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AIRY FAIRY LILLIAN

By
THE AUTHOR OF
"PHYLLIS"

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'AIRY FAIRY LILIAN'

SECOND VOLUME

'AIRY FAIRY LILIAN'

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'PHYLLIS' 'MOLLY BAWN' &c.

Youth, I do adore thee;
Oh! my Love, my Love is young!'

The Passionate Pilgrim

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



LONDON
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'AIRY FAIRY LILIAN.'

CHAPTER XII.

Sae sweet his voice, sae smooth his tongue,
His breath's like caller air;
His very fit has music in't,
As he comes up the stair.

And will I see his face again?
And will I hear him speak?
I'm downright dizzy with the thought,
In troth I'm like to greet. W. J. Mickle.

IT is the most important day of all the three hundred and sixty-five, at least to Lilian, because it will bring her Taffy. Just before dinner he will arrive, not sooner, and it is now only half-past four.

All at Chetwoode are met in the library. The perfume of tea is on the air; the click of Lady Chetwoode's needles keeps time to the conversation that is buzzing all round.

Miss Beauchamp, serene and immovable as ever, is presiding over the silver and china, while Lilian, wild with spirits, and half mad, with excitement and expectation, is chattering with Cyril upon a distant sofa.

Sir Guy, upon the hearth-rug, is expressing his contempt for the views entertained by a certain periodical on the subject of a famous military scandal, in real parliamentary language, and Florence is meekly agreeing with him straight through. Never was anyone (seemingly) so thoroughly *en rapport* with another as Florence with Sir Guy. Her amiable, and rather palpable determination to second his ideas on all matters, her 'nods and becks and wreathed smiles,' when in his company, would,

if recited, fill a volume in themselves. But I don't deny it would be a very stupid volume, from the same to the same, so I suppress it.

'Sir Guy,' says Lilian, suddenly; 'don't look so stern, and don't stand with one hand in your breast, and one foot advanced as though you were going to address the House.'

'Well, but he is going to address the House,' says Cyril, reprovingly; 'we are all here, aren't we?'

'It is perfectly preposterous,' says Guy, who is heated with his argument, and scarcely hears what is going on around him, so great is his righteous indignation. 'If being of high birth is a reason why one must be dragged into notoriety, one would almost wish one was born a——'

'Sir Guy,' interrupts Lilian again, throwing at him a paper pellet, she has been preparing for the last two minutes, with sure and certain

aim, 'didn't you hear me desire you not to look like that?'

Sir Guy laughs, and subsides into a chair. Miss Beauchamp shrugs her shapely shoulders and indulges in a smile suggestive of pity.

'I begin to feel outrageously jealous of this unknown Taffy,' says Cyril. 'I never knew you in such good spirits before. Do you always laugh when you are happy?'

'"Much laughter covers many tears,"' returns Lilian gaily. 'Yes, I am very happy. So happy that I think a little would make me cry.'

'Oh, don't,' says Cyril entreatingly; 'if you begin I am safe to follow suit, and weeping violently always makes me ill.'

'I can readily believe it,' says Miss Chesney. 'Your expression is unmistakably doleful, oh, Knight of the rueful countenance!'

'And his manner is so dejected,' remarks his mother, smiling. 'Have you not noticed how silent he always is? One might easily imagine him the victim of an unhappy love tale.'

'If you say much more,' says Mr. Chetwoode, 'like Keats, I shall "die of a review." I feel much offended. It has been the dream of my life up to this that society in general regarded me as a gay and brilliant personage, one fitted to shine in any sphere, concentrating (as I hoped I did) rank, beauty, and fashion in my own body.'

'*Did* you hope all that?' asks Lilian with soft impertinence.

'"A modest hope, but modesty's my forte,"' returns he, mildly. 'No, Miss Chesney, I won't be told I am conceited. This is a case in which we "all do it;" everyone in this life thinks himself better than he is.'

'I am glad you so scrupulously exonerate the women,' says Lilian, maliciously.

At this moment a step is heard in the hall outside; Lilian starts, and rises impulsively to her feet; her face lights; a delicate pink flush dawns upon it slowly, and then deepens into a rich carnation. Instinctively her eyes turn to Lady Chetwoode, and the breath comes a little quicker from her parted lips.

'But,' she murmurs, raising one hand, and speaking in the low tone one adopts when intently listening. 'But that I know he can't be here for another hour, I should say that was—Taffy!'

The door has opened. A tall, very young man, with a bright boyish face, fair brown hair, and a daring attempt at a moustache, stands upon the threshold. Lilian, with a little soft glad cry, runs to him and throws herself into his arms.

'Oh, dear, dear boy, you have come!' she says, whereupon the tall young man laughs delightedly, and bestows upon her a honest and most palpable hug.

'Hug' quotha! and what is a 'hug'? asks the fastidious reader; and yet, dear Ignorance, I think there is no word in all the English language, or any other language, that so efficiently describes the enthusiasm of a warm embrace as that small one of three letters.

Be it vulgar or not, however, I cannot help it; the fact remains. Taffy openly and boldly hugged Miss Chesney before her guardian's eyes, and Miss Chesney does not resent it; on the contrary, she kisses him with considerable *empressement*, and then turns to Lady Chetwoode, who is an admiring spectator of the scene. Cyril is visibly amused; Sir Guy a trifle envious; Miss Beauchamp thinks the newcomer far too grown for the reception of such

a public demonstration of affection on the part of a well-conducted young woman; but is rather glad than otherwise that Lilian has so far committed herself before her guardian.

'It is Taffy,' says Lilian with much pride. 'I knew it was. Do you know,' turning her sweet, flushed, excited face to her cousin, 'the moment I heard your step outside, I said "that is Taffy," and it *was*,' with a charming laugh.

Meanwhile Mr. Musgrave is being kindly received by Lady Chetwoode and her sons.

'It was so awfully good of you to ask me here!' he is saying gratefully, and with all a boy's delightful frankness of tone and manner. 'If you hadn't I shouldn't have known what to do, because I hate going to my guardian's, one puts in such a bad time there, the old man is so grumpy. When I got your invitation I said to myself "Well, I *am* in luck!"'

Here he is introduced to Miss Beauchamp,

and presses the hand she extends to him with much friendliness, being in radiant spirits with himself and the world generally.

'Why, Taffy, you aren't a bit altered, though I do think you have grown half-an-inch or so,' says Lilian, critically, 'and I am so glad of it. When I heard you had really joined and become an undeniable "heavy," I began to fear you would change, and grow grand, and perhaps think yourself a man, and put on a great deal of "side;" isn't that the word, Sir Guy?' saucily, peeping at him from behind Taffy's back. 'You mustn't correct me because I heard you use that word this morning; and I am sure you would not give way to a naughty expression.'

'We are all very glad to have you, Mr. Musgrave,' says Lady Chetwoode, graciously, who has taken an instantaneous fancy to him. 'I hope your visit will be a happy one.'

'Thank you, I know it will, but my name is Taffy,' says young Musgrave. 'I hope you will call me by it. I hardly know myself by any other name now,' he says this with a laugh so exactly like Lilian's that they all notice it, and comment upon it afterwards. Indeed, both in feature and manner, he strongly resembles his cousin. Lady Chetwoode smiles and promises to forget the more formal address for the future.

'I have so many things to show you,' exclaims Lilian, fondly. 'The stables here are even better than at the Park, and I have a brown mare all my own, and I am sure I could beat you at tennis now, and there are six lovely new fat little puppies; will you come and see them? but, perhaps'—doubtfully—'of course you are tired.'

'He must be tired, I think, and hungry too,' says Guy, coming up to him and laying his

hand upon his shoulder. 'If you can spare him for a moment or two, Lilian, I will show Taffy his room.' Here Guy smiles at his new guest, and when Guy smiles he is charming. Mr. Musgrave likes him on the spot.

'I will go with you,' says Lilian, promptly, who is never troubled with the pangs of etiquette, and who cannot as yet bear to lose sight of her boy. 'Such a pretty room as it is! It is near mine, and has an exquisite view from it—the lake and the swans, and part of the garden. Oh, Taffy, I am so *glad* you are come!'

They are half-way up the stairs by this time, and Lilian, putting her hand through her cousin's arm, beams upon him so sweetly that Guy, who is the looker-on, feels he would give a small fortune for permission to kiss her without further delay. Taffy does kiss her on the instant without having to waste any fortune, or ask

any permission; and Chetwoode, seeing how graciously the caress is received and returned, feels a strange trouble at his heart. How fond she is of this boy! Surely he is more to her than any cousin ever yet was to another.

At the head of the stairs another interruption occurs. Advancing towards them, arrayed in her roomiest, most amazing cap, and clad in her Sunday gown, appears Mrs. Tipping, shining with joy and expectation. Seeing Taffy, she opens wide her capacious arms, into which Mr. Musgrave precipitates himself, and is for the moment lost.

When he comes to light again, he embraces her warmly, and placing his hands upon her shoulders regards her smilingly.

'Bless the boy, how he has grown to be sure!' says Nurse, with tears in her eyes; taking out her spectacles with much deliberation, she carefully adjusts them on her substantial nose,

and again subjects him to a loving examination.

'Yes; hasn't he, Nurse? I said so,' remarks Lilian in raptures, while Sir Guy stands behind, much edified.

'So have you, Nurse,' says Master Taffy—'*young*. I protest it is a shame the way you go on deceiving the public. Every year only sees you fresher and lovelier. Why, you are ten years younger than when last I saw you. It's uncommonly mean of you not to give us a hint as to how you manage it.'

'Tut,' says Nurse, giving him a scornful poke with her first finger, though she is tremendously flattered, 'be off with you; you are worse than ever. Eh, but I always knew how it would be if you took to soldiering. All the millingtary has soft tongues, and the gift o' the gab.'

'How do you know, Nurse?' demands Mr.

Musgrave; 'I always understood the fortunate Tipping was a retired mason. I am afraid at some period of your life you must have lost your heart to a bold Dragoon. Never mind, my soldiering shan't bring me to grief if only for your sake.'

'Eh, darling, I hope not,' says Nurse, surveying with fond admiration his handsome boyish face; 'such bonnie looks as yours should aye sit upon a high head.'

'I decline to listen to any more flattery. It is downright demoralising,' says Mr. Musgrave, virtuously, and presently finds himself in his pretty room, that is sweet with the blossoms of Lilian's gathering.

* * * * *

Mr. Musgrave on acquaintance proves as great a success as his cousin—indeed to like one is to like the other, as no twins could be more similar. He takes very kindly to the

house and all its inmates, and is, after one day's association, as much at home with them as though they had been his chosen intimates all his life.

His disposition is certainly sweeter than Lilian's—bad temper of any sort being quite unknown to him; whereas Miss Chesney possesses a will of her own, and a very quick temper indeed. He is bright, sunny, lovable in disposition, and almost 'without guile.' So irresistible is he that even Miss Beauchamp smiles upon him, and is singularly gracious to him, considering he is not only a youngster but —far worse—a detrimental.

He has one very principal charm. Unlike all the youthful soldiers it has been my misfortune to meet, he does not spend his days wearying his friends with a vivid description of his rooms, his daily duties when on parade, his colonel, and his brother officers. For this

grace alone his familiars should love him and be grateful to him.

Nevertheless he is so far human that, the evening after his arrival, he whispers to Lilian how he has brought his uniform with him, for her inspection only. Whereupon Lilian, delighted, desires him to go up that instant and put it on, that she may pass judgment upon him without delay. No; she will not wait another second, she cannot know peace or happiness until she beholds him in all his grandeur.

After a faint demur—and the suggestion that as it is late he could scarcely get it on and have time afterwards to dress for dinner—he gives in, and binding her to secresy, runs up stairs, having named a certain time for her to follow him.

Half an hour later Miss Beauchamp, sweeping slowly along the corridor upstairs, hears

the sound of merriment coming from young Musgrave's room, and stops short.

Is that Lilian's voice? surely it is; and in her cousin's room! The door is almost closed —not quite; and, overcome by curiosity, she lays her hand against it, and pushing it gently open, glances in.

Before the dressing-table, clothed in military garments of the most *recherché* description is Taffy, while opposite to him full of open admiration stands Miss Chesney. Taffy is struggling with some part of his dress that declines to fall into a right position, and Lilian is flouting him merrily for the evident inexperience he betrays.

Florence, astonished—nay, electrified—by this scene, stands motionless. A young woman in a young man's bedroom. Oh! shocking! To her carefully educated mind, the whole thing borders on the improper, while to have it

occur in such a well-regulated household as Chetwoode fills her with genuine horror.

So struck is she by the criminality of it all, that she might have stayed there until now, but that a well-known step coming up the stairs warns her that eavesdropping is not the most honourable position to be caught in. She moves away and presently finds herself face to face with Guy. He is coming lazily along the corridor, but stops as he sees her.

'What is it, Florence? You look frightened,' he says half jestingly.

'No, not frightened,' Florence answers, coldly, 'though I confess I am a good deal amazed'— her tone says 'disgusted,' and Guy knows the tone. 'Really that girl seems absolutely ignorant of the common decencies of society!'

'Of whom are you speaking?' asks Guy, colouring.

'Of whom can I say such things but Lilian? She is the only one of my acquaintance deserving of such a remark, and it is not my fault that we are acquainted. I think it is clearly Aunt Anne's duty to speak to her, or yours. There are moments when one positively blushes for her.'

'Why—what has she been doing?' asks Guy, overcome with astonishment at this outburst on the part of the usually calm Florence.

'Doing! Do you not hear her in her cousin's room? Is that the proper place for a young lady?'

At this instant a sound of laughter coming from Mr. Musgrave's apartment gives truth to her accusations, and with a slight but expressive shrug of her white shoulders, Florence sails majestically down the stairs while Sir Guy instinctively moves on towards Taffy's quarters.

Miss Beauchamp's touch has left the door

quite open, so that, standing on the threshold, he can see clearly all that is within.

By this time Taffy is quite arrayed, having finally resorted to his cousin's help.

'There!' says Lilian, triumphantly, 'now you are ready. Oh! I say, Taffy, how nice you do look!'

'No; do I?' returns Mr. Musgrave with admirable modesty, regarding himself bashfully though complacently in a full-length mirror. His tall young figure is well drawn up; his head is erect; unconsciously he has assumed all the full-blown, starchy airs of a military swell. 'Does the coat fit well do you think?' he asks, turning to await her answer with doubtful anxiety.

'It is simply perfection,' returns she, reassuringly; 'not a wrinkle in it. Certainly you owe your tailor something for turning you out so well.'

'I do,' says Taffy, feelingly.

'I had no idea it would make such a difference in you,' goes on Lilian; 'you look quite grown up.'

'Grown up—nonsense,' somewhat indignantly; 'I should think I was indeed. Just twenty, and six feet one. There are very few fellows in the service as good a height as I am. "Grown up" indeed!'

'I beg your pardon,' Lilian says, meekly. 'Remember I am only a little rustic hardly aware of what a man really means. Talking of fitting, however, do you know,' thoughtfully, and turning her head to one side, the better to mark the effect, 'I think—I fancy—there is a little pucker in your trousers, just at the knee.'

'No; is there?' says Taffy, immediately sinking into the deepest melancholy as he again refers to the glass.

Here Sir Guy comes forward and creates a

diversion. He is immensely amused, but still sore and angry at Florence's remarks, while wishing Lilian would not place herself in such positions as lay her open to unkind criticism.

'Oh! here is Sir Guy,' says that young lady quite unembarrassed; 'he will decide. Sir Guy—do you think his trousers fit very well? Look here now—is there not the faintest pucker here?'

'I think they fit uncommonly well,' says Guy, gravely. Taffy has turned a warm crimson and is silent; but his confusion arises, not from Miss Chesney's presence in his room, but because Chetwoode has discovered him trying on his new clothes like a schoolboy.

'Lilian wanted so much to see me in my uniform,' he says, meanly, considering how anxious he himself has been to show himself to her in it.

'Yes, and doesn't he look well in it?' asks

Lilian, proudly; 'I had no idea he could look so handsome. Most men appear perfect fools in uniform, but it suits Taffy. Don't you think so?'

'I do; and I think something else too; your Auntie is coming upstairs, and if she catches you in Taffy's room, she will give you a small lecture on the proprieties.'

This is the mildest rebuke he can think of. Not that he thinks her at all worthy of rebuke, but because he is afraid of Florence's tongue for her sake.

'Why?' asks Lilian, opening large eyes of utter amazement, after which the truth dawns upon her, and as it dawns amuses her intensely. 'Do you mean to say it is an impropriety, my being here?' she says, blushing slightly, but evidently struck with the comicality of the thought. 'What would Auntie say, then, if she knew Taffy had been in mine? Yes; he

was—this afternoon—just before lunch,' nodding defiantly at Sir Guy, 'actually in mine; and he stole my eau de Cologne, which I thought mean of him. When I found it was all gone, I was very near running across to your room to replenish my bottle. Was it not well I didn't? Had I done so I should of course have earned two lectures, one from Auntie and one from—you!' provokingly. 'Why, Guardy, how stupid you are, Taffy is just the same as my brother.'

'But he is not your brother,' says Guy, beginning to feel bewildered.

'Yes he is, and better than most brothers —aren't you, Taffy?'

'Are you angry with Lil for being in my room?' asks Mr. Musgrave, surprised; 'she thinks nothing of it, and why should she? Bless you, all last year when we were at home —at the Park—she used to come in and settle

my ties when we were going out anywhere to dinner, or that.'

'Sir Guy never had a sister, so of course he doesn't understand,' says Lilian, disdainfully, whereupon Guy gives up the point. 'I wish you would come down and show yourself to Auntie. Do, now, Taffy'—coaxingly; 'you can't think how well you look. Come, if only to please me.'

'Oh, I couldn't,' says Taffy, 'I really couldn't, you know. She would think me such an awful fool, and Miss Beauchamp would laugh at me, and altogether it wouldn't be form. I only meant to show myself to you, but——'

'Guy my dear,' says Lady Chetwoode from the doorway, 'why, what is going on here?' advancing and smiling gently.

'Oh! Auntie, I am so glad you have come!' says Lilian, going forward to welcome her; 'he

would not go downstairs to you, though I did my best to persuade him. Is he not charming in uniform?'

'He is, indeed. Quite charming! He reminds me very much of what Guy was when first he joined his regiment.' Not for a moment does Lady Chetwoode—dear soul—think of improprieties, or wrongdoing, or the 'decencies of society.' And, watching her, Guy grows gradually ashamed of himself. 'It was really selfish of you, my dear Taffy, to deny me a glimpse of you.'

'Well, I didn't think you'd care, you know,' says Mr. Musgrave, who is positively consumed with pride, and who is blushing like a demoiselle.

'I couldn't resist coming in when I saw you from the doorway. All my people were in the army so I have quite an affection for it. But

Lilian, darling, dinner is almost ready, and you have not yet changed your dress.'

'I shan't be a minute,' says Lilian; and Guy, lighting a candle escorts her to her own room, while Lady Chetwoode goes downstairs.

'Shall I get you the eau de Cologne now?' he asks, pausing on her threshold for a moment.

'If,' says Miss Chesney, lowering her eyes with affected shyness, 'you are *quite* sure there would be nothing reprehensible in my accepting it, I should like it very much, thank you. By-the-by, that reminds me,' glancing at him with a mocking smile, 'Lady Chetwoode quite forgot to deliver that small lecture. You, Sir Guy, as my guardian, should have reminded her.'

CHAPTER XIII.

Sweets to the sweet.—HAMLET.

'I AM going to London in the morning. Can I do anything for anybody?' asks Sir Guy at exactly twenty minutes past ten on Wednesday night. 'Madré, what of you?'

'Nothing, dear, thank you,' says the Madré lazily enough, her eyes comfortably closed. 'But to-morrow, my dear boy! why to-morrow? You know we expect Archibald.'

'I shall be home long before he arrives, if I don't meet him and bring him with me.'

'Some people make a point of being from home when their guests are expected,' says Miss Lilian pointedly, raising demure eyes to his.

'Some other people make a point of being ungenerous,' retorts he. 'Florence, can I bring you anything?'

'I want some wools matched: I cannot finish the parrot's tail in my crewel work until I get them, and you will be some hours earlier than the post.'

'What! you expect me to enter a fancy shop—is that what you call it?—and sort wools, while the young woman behind the counter makes love to me? I should die of shame.'

'Nonsense; you need only hand in the envelope I will prepare for you, and wait until you receive an answer to it.'

'Very good. I daresay I shall survive so

much. And you, my ward? How can I serve you?'

'In a thousand ways, but modesty forbids my mentioning them. *Au reste,* I want bonbons, a new book or two, and—the portrait of the handsomest young man in London.'

'I thoroughly understand, and am immensely flattered. I shall have myself taken the moment I get there. Would you prefer me sitting or standing, with my hat on or off? A small size or a cabinet?'

Miss Chesney makes a little grimace eminently becoming, but disdains direct reply. 'I said a *young* man,' she remarks severely.

'I heard you. Am not I in the flower of my youth and beauty?'

'Lilian evidently does not think so,' says Florence, with a would-be air of intense surprise.

'Why should I, when it suits me to think

differently?' returns Lilian calmly. Florence rather amuses her than otherwise. 'Sir Guy and I are quite good friends at present. He has been civil to me for two whole days together, and has not once told me I have a horrid temper, or held me up to scorn in any way. Such conduct deserves reward. Therefore I liken him to an elderly gentleman, because I adore old men. You see, Guardy?' with an indescribably fascinating air, that has a suspicion of sauciness only calculated to heighten its charm.

'I should think he is old in reality to you,' says Florence; 'you are such a child.'

'I am,' says Lilian, agreeably though secretly annoyed at the other's slighting tone. 'I like it. There is nothing so good as youth. I should like to be eighteen always. But for my babyish ways, and utter hopelessness, I feel positive Sir Guy would have beaten

me long ago. But who could chastise an infant?'

'In long robes,' puts in Cyril, who is deep in the intricacies of chess with Mr. Musgrave.

'Besides I am "Esther Summerson," and he is "Mr. Jarndyce," and Esther's "Guardy" very rightly was in perfect subjection to his ward.'

'Esther's guardian, if I remember correctly, fell in love with her; and she let him see'—dreamily but spitefully—'that she preferred another.'

'Ah, Sir Guy, think of that. See what lies before you,' says Lilian, colouring warmly, but braving it out to the end.

'I am sure you are going to ask me what I should like, Guy,' breaks in Cyril languidly, who is not so engrossed by his game but he can heed Lilian's embarrassment. 'Those cigars of yours are excellent. I shall feel

obliged by your bringing me (as a free gift, mind) half-a-dozen boxes. If you do it will be a saving, as for the future I shall leave yours in peace.'

'Thank you—I shall make a note of it,' says Guy, laughing.

'Do you go early, Sir Guy?' asks Lilian presently. She is leaning back in a huge lounging-chair of blue satin that almost conceals from view her tiny figure. In her hands is an ebony fan, and as she asks the question she closes and uncloses it indolently.

'Very early. I must start at seven to catch the train, if I wish to get my business done and be back by five.'

'What an unearthly hour for a poor old gentleman like you to rise! You won't recover it in a hurry. You will breakfast before you go?'

'Yes.'

'What a lunch you will eat when you get to town! But don't overdo it, Guardy. You will be starving, no doubt; but remember the horrors of gout.—And who will give you your breakfast at seven?'

She raises her large soft eyes to his, and, unfurling her fan, lays it thoughtfully against her pretty lips. Sir Guy is about to make an eager reply, when Miss Beauchamp interposes.

'I always give Guy his breakfast when he goes to London,' she says, calmly yet hastily.

'Check!' says Cyril at this instant, with his eyes on the board. 'My dear Musgrave, what a false move—a fatal delay. Don't you know bold play generally wins?'

'Sometimes it loses,' retorts Taffy innocently; which reply, to his surprise, appears to cause Mr. Chetwoode infinite amusement.

'Whenever you do go,' says Lilian to Sir Guy, 'don't forget my sweetmeats: I shall be

dreaming of them until I see you again. Have you a pocket-book? Yes? Well, put down in it what I most particularly love. I like chocolate creams and burnt almonds better than anything in the world.'

Cyril, with dreamy sentiment: 'How I wish I was a burnt almond!'

Miss Chesney, viciously: 'If you were, what a bite I would give you!'

Taffy, to Sir Guy: 'Lilian's tastes and mine are one. If you are really going to bring lollypops, please make the supply large. When I think of burnt almonds I feel no end hungry.'

Lilian, vigorously: 'You shan't have any of mine, Taffy. Don't imagine it! Yesterday you eat every one Cyril brought me from Fenston. I crossed the room for one instant and when I came back the box was literally cleared. Wasn't it a shame? I shan't go

into partnership with you over Sir Guy's confections.'

Taffy, *sotto voce*: 'Greedy little thing!' Then suddenly, addressing Sir Guy, 'I think I saw your old Colonel—Trant—about the neighbourhood to-day.'

Cyril draws himself up with a start and looks hard at the lad, who is utterly unconscious of the private bombshell he has discharged.

'Trant!' says Guy, surprised; 'impossible. Unless, indeed,' with a light laugh, 'he came to look after his *protégée* the widow.

'Mrs. Arlington? I saw her yesterday,' says Taffy with animation. 'She was in her garden, and she is lovely. I never saw anything so perfect as her smile.'

'I hope you are not *épris* with her. We warn everybody against our tenant,' Guy says, smiling, though there is evident meaning in his tone. 'We took her to oblige Trant—who

begged we would not be inquisitive about her; and literally we are in ignorance of who she is, or where she came from. Widows, like cousins, are dangerous,' with a slight glance at his brother, who is leaning back in his chair, a knight between his fingers, taking an exhaustive though nonchalant survey of the painted ceiling, where all the little loves and graces are playing at a very pronounced game of hide-and-seek amongst the roses.

'I hope,' says Florence slowly, looking up from the *rara avis* whose tail she is elaborately embroidering—the original of which was never yet (most assuredly) seen by land or sea—'I hope Colonel Trant, in this instance, has not played you false. I cannot say I admire Mrs. Arlington's appearance. Though no doubt she is pretty—in a certain style,' concludes Miss Beauchamp, who is an adept at uttering the faint praise that damns.

'Trant is a gentleman,' returns Guy, somewhat coldly. Yet as he says it a doubt enters his mind.

'He has the name of being rather fast in town,' says young Musgrave, vaguely; 'there is some story about his being madly in love with some mysterious woman whom nobody knows. I don't remember exactly how it is—but they say she is hidden away somewhere.'

'How delightfully definite Taffy always is,' Lilian says admiringly; 'it is so easy to grasp his meaning. Got any more stories, Taffy? I quite begin to fancy this Colonel Trant. Is he as captivating as he is wicked?'

'Not quite. I am almost sure I saw him to-day in the lane that runs down between the wood and Brown's farm. But I may be mistaken; I was certainly one or two fields off, yet I have a sure eye, and I have seen him often in London.'

'Perhaps Mrs. Arlington is the mysterious lady of his affections,' says Guy, laughing; and, the moment the words have passed his lips, regrets their utterance. Cyril's eyes descend rapidly from the ceiling and meet his. On the instant a suspicion unnamed and unacknowledged fills both their hearts.

'Do you really think Trant came down to see your tenant?' asks Cyril, almost defiantly.

'Certainly not,' returning the other's somewhat fiery glance calmly. 'I do not believe he would be in the neighbourhood without coming to see my mother.'

At the last word, so dear to her, Lady Chetwoode wakes gently, opens her still beautiful eyes, and smiles benignly on all around, as though defying them to say she has slumbered for half a second.

'Yes, my dear Guy, I quite agree with you,' she says affably, *à propos* of nothing unless it

be a dream, and then, being fully roused, suggests going to bed. Whereupon Florence says with gentle thoughtfulness,

'Indeed yes. If Guy is to be up early in the morning, he ought to go to bed now;' and rising as her aunt rises, makes a general move.

When the women have disappeared, and resigned themselves to the tender mercies of their maids, and the men have sought that best beloved of all apartments the Tabagie, a sudden resolution to say something that lies heavy on his mind takes possession of Guy. Of all things on earth he hates most a 'scene,' but some power within him compels him to speak just now. The intense love he bears his only brother, his fear lest harm should befall him, urges him on, sorely against his will, to give some faint utterance to all that is puzzling and distressing him.

Taffy, seduced by the sweetness of the

night, has stepped out into the garden, where he is enjoying his weed alone. Within, the lamp is almost quenched by the great pale rays of the moon that rush through the open window. Without, the whole world is steeped in one white, glorious splendour.

The stars on high are twinkling, burning, like distant lamps. Anon one darts madly across the dark blue amphitheatre overhead, and is lost in space, while the others laugh on, unheeding its swift destruction. The flowers are sleeping, emitting in their dreams faint, delicate perfumed sighs; the cattle have ceased to low in the far fields; there is no sound through all the busy land save the sweet soughing of the wind, and the light tread of Musgrave's footsteps up and down outside.

'Cyril,' says Guy, removing the meerschaum from between his lips, and regarding its elaborate silver bands with some nervousness, 'I wish

you would not go to the Cottage so often as you do.'

'No? And why not *très cher*?' asks Cyril calmly, knowing well what is coming.

'For one thing, we do not know who this Mrs. Arlington is, or anything of her. That in itself is a drawback. I am sorry I ever agreed to Trant's proposal, but it is too late for regret in that quarter. Do not double my regret by making me feel I have done you harm.'

'You shall never feel that. How you do torture yourself over shadows, Guy. I always think it must be the greatest bore on earth to be conscientious; that is, over-scrupulous, like you. It is a mistake, dear boy, take my word for it—will wear you out before your time.'

'I am thinking of you, Cyril. Forgive me if I seem impertinent. Mrs. Arlington is lovely, graceful, everything of the most desirable in appearance, but——.' A pause.

'*Après?*' murmurs Cyril, lazily.

'But,' earnestly, 'I should not like you to lose your heart to her, as you force me to say it. Musgrave says he saw Trant in the lane to-day. Of course he may have been mistaken, but was he? I have my own doubts, Cyril,' rising in some agitation, 'doubts that may be unjust, but I cannot conquer them. If you allow yourself to love that woman, she will bring you misfortune. Why is she so secret about her former life? Why does she shun society? Cyril, be warned in time; she may be a ——, she may be anything,' checking himself slowly.

'She may,' says Cyril, rising with a passionate irrepressible movement to his feet, under pretence of lighting the cigar that has died out between his fingers. Then, with a sudden change of tone and a soft laugh, 'The skies may fall, of course, but we scarcely anticipate it.

My good Guy, what a visionary you are! Do be rational, if you can. As for Mrs. Arlington, why should she create dissension between you and me?'

'Why, indeed?' returns Guy, gravely. 'I have to ask your pardon for my interference. But you know I only speak when I feel compelled, and always for your good.'

'You are about the best fellow going, I know that,' replies Cyril deliberately, knocking the ash off his cigar; 'but at times you are wont to lose your head—to wander—like the best of us. I am safe enough, trust me. "What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba?" Come, don't let us spoil this glorious night by a dissertation on what we neither of us know anything about. What a starlight!' standing at the open casement, and regarding with quick admiration the glistening dome above him. 'I wonder how anyone

looking on it can disbelieve in a heaven beyond!'

Here Musgrave's fair head makes a blot in the perfect calm of the night scene.

'Is that you, Taffy? Where have you been all this time?—mooning?—you have had ample opportunity. But you are too young for Melancholy to mark you as her own. It is only old folk like Guy,' with a laughing though affectionate glance backward to where his brother stands, somewhat perplexed, beside the lamp, 'should fall victims to the blues.'

'A fig for melancholy!' says Taffy, vaulting lightly into the room, and by his presence putting an end to all private conversation between the brothers.

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The next morning Lilian (to whom early rising is a pure delight), running down the broad stone stairs two steps at a time, finds Guy

on the eve of starting, with Florence beside him, looking positively handsome in the most thrilling of morning gowns. She has forsaken her virtuous couch, and slighted the balmy slumber she so much loves, to give him his breakfast, and is still unremitting in her attentions, and untiring with regard to her smiles.

'Not gone!' says Lilian, wickedly; 'how disappointed I am to be sure! I fancied my bonbons an hour nearer to me than they really are. Bad Guardy, why don't you hurry?' She says this with the prettiest affectation of infantile grace, accompanied by a coquettish glance from under her sweeping lashes that creates in Florence a mad desire to box her ears.

'You forget it will not hasten the train five seconds, Guy's leaving this sooner than he does,' she says snubbingly. 'To picture him

sitting in a draughty station could not—I should think—give satisfaction to anyone.'

'It could'—wilfully—'to me. It would show a proper anxiety to obey my behests. Guardy,' with touching concern, 'are you sure you are warm enough? Now do promise me one thing—that you will beware of the crossings; they say any number of old men come to grief in that way yearly, and are run over through deafness, or short sight, or stupidity in general. Think how horrid it would be, if they sent us home your mangled remains.'

'Go in, you naughty child, and learn to speak to your elders with respect,' says Guy, laughing, and putting her bodily inside the hall-door, from whence she trips out again to wave him a last adieu, and kiss her hand warmly to him as he disappears round the corner of the lauristinus bush.

And Sir Guy drives away full of his ward's

fresh girlish loveliness, her slender lissome figure, her laughing face, the thousand tantalising graces that go to make her what she is; forgetful of Miss Beauchamp's more matured charms—her white gown—her honeyed words —everything.

All day long Lilian's image follows him. It is beside him in the crowded street, enters his club with him, haunts him in his business, laughs at him in his most serious moods. While she, at home, scarce thinks of him at all, or at the most vaguely, though, when at five he does return, she is the first to greet him.

'He has come home. He is here,' she cries, dancing into the hall. 'Have you escaped the crossings? and rheumatism? and your old enemy lumbago? Good old Guardy, let me help you off with your coat. So. Positively he is all here—not a bit of him gone —and none the worse for wear!'

'Tired, Guy?' asks Florence, coming gracefully forward—slowly—lest by unseemly haste she should disturb the perfect fold of her train, that sets off her figure to such advantage. She speaks warmly, appropriatingly, as one's wife might, after a long journey.

'Tired! not he,' returns Lilian irreverently; 'he is quite a gay old gentleman. Nor hungry either. No doubt he has lunched profusely in town, "not wisely, but too well," as somebody says. Where are my sweeties, Sir Ancient?'

'My dear Lilian'—rebukingly—'if you reflect, you will see he must be both tired and hungry.'

'So am I for my creams—I quite pine for them. Sir Guy, where *are* my sweeties?'

'Here, little cormorant,' says Guy, as fondly as he dares, handing her a gigantic *bonbonnière* in which chocolates and French

sweetmeats fight for mastery; 'have I got you what you wanted?'

'Yes, indeed; *best* of Guardy's, I only wish I might kiss my thanks.'

'You may.'

'Better not. Such a condescension on my part might turn your old head. Oh! Taffy,' with an exclamation, 'you bad greedy boy! you have taken half my almonds! well, you shan't have any of the others, for punishment. Auntie, and Florence, and I, will eat the rest.'

'Thanks,' drawls Florence languidly; 'but I am always so terrified about tooth-ache.'

'What a pity,' says Miss Chesney. 'If I had tooth-ache I should have all my teeth drawn instantly, and false ones put in their place.'

To this Miss Beauchamp, being undecided in her own mind as to whether it

is or is not an impertinence, deigns no reply. Cyril, with a gravity that belies his innermost feelings, gazes hard at Lilian, only to acknowledge her innocent of desire to offend.

'You did not meet Archibald?' asks Lady Chetwoode of Guy.

'No; I suppose he will be down by next train. Chesney is always up to time.'

'Lilian, my dear, where is my fourth knitting-needle?' asks Auntie, mildly. 'I lent it to you this morning for some purpose.'

'It is upstairs; you shall have it in one moment,' returns Lilian, moving towards the door; and Sir Guy, muttering something about getting rid of the dust of travel, follows her out of the room.

At the foot of the stairs he says,

'Lilian.'

'Yes?'

'I have brought you yet another bonbon. Will you accept it?'

As he speaks he holds out to her an open case, in which lies a pretty ring composed of pearls and diamonds.

'For me? Oh, Sir Guy!' says Lilian, flushing with pleasure, 'what a lovely present to bring me.' Then her expression changes, and her face falls somewhat. She has lived long enough to know that young men do not, as a rule, go about giving costly rings to young women without a motive. Perhaps she ought to refuse it. Perhaps Auntie would think it wrong of her to take it. And if there is really anything between him and Florence——? Yet what a pretty ring it is, and how the diamonds glitter! And what woman can resign diamonds without a struggle?

'Will Auntie be vexed if I take it?' she asks honestly, after a pause, raising her clear

eyes to his, thereby betraying the fear that is tormenting her.

'Why should she? Surely,' with a smile, 'an elderly guardian may make a present to his youthful ward without being brought to task for it.'

'And Florence?' asks Lilian, speaking impulsively, but half jestingly.

'Does it signiify what she thinks?' returns he a little stiffly. 'It is a mere bauble, and scarcely worth so much thought. You remember that day down by the stream, when you said you were so fond of rings?'

'No.'

'Well, I do, as I remember most things you say, be they kind or cruel,' softly. 'To-day, though I cannot explain why, this ring reminded me of you, so I bought it, thinking you might fancy it.'

'So I do; it is quite too lovely,' says Lilian,

feeling as though she had been ungracious, and, what is worse, prudish. 'Thank you very much. I shall wear it this evening with my new dress, and it will help me to make an impression on my unknown cousin.'

She holds out her hand to him; it is the right one, and Guy slips the ring upon the third finger of it, while she, forgetting it is the engaged finger, makes no objection.

Sir Guy, still holding the little cool slim hand, looks at her fixedly, and looking, decides regretfully she is quite ignorant of his meaning.

'How it sparkles,' she says, moving her hand gently to and fro, so that the light falls upon it from different directions. 'Thank you again, Guardy; you are always better to me than I deserve.' She says this warmly, being desirous of removing all traces of her late hesitation, and quite oblivious of her former scruples. But the moment she leaves him she remembers

them again; and coming downstairs with Lady Chetwoode's needle, and finding her alone, says with a heightened colour, 'See what a charming present Sir Guy has brought me.'

'Very pretty indeed,' Lady Chetwoode says, examining the ring with interest. 'Dear Guy has such taste, and he is always so thoughtful, ever thinking how to please some one. I am glad it has been you this time, pussy,' kissing the girl's smiling lips as she bends over her. So that Miss Chesney, reassured by her Auntie's kind words, goes up to dress for the reception of her cousin Archibald, with a clear and therefore happy conscience. Not for all the diamonds in Christendom would she have concealed even so small a secret as the acceptance of this ring from one whom she professes to love, and who she knows trusts in her.

CHAPTER XIV.

Kate. 'I never saw a better fashion'd gown,
More quaint, more pleasing, nor more commendable.'
Taming of the Shrew.

THIS dressing of Lilian for the undoing of her cousin is a wonderful affair, and occupies a considerable time. Not that she spends any of it in a dainty hesitation over the choice of the gown fated to work his overthrow; all that has been decided on long ago, and the fruit of many days' deep thought now lies upon her bed, bearing in its every fold—in each soft fall of lace—all the distinguishing marks that stamp the work of the inimitable Worth.

At length—Nurse having admired and praised her to her heart's content, and given the last fond finishing touches to her toilette—Miss Chesney stands arrayed for conquest. She is dressed in a marvellous robe of black velvet—cut *à la Princesse*, simply fashioned, fitting *à merveille*—being yet in mourning for her father. It is a little open at the throat, so that her neck—soft and fair as a child's—may be partly seen (looking all the whiter for the blackness that frames it in), and has the sleeves very tight and ending at the elbow, from which rich folds of Mechlin lace hang downwards. Around her throat is a narrow band of black velvet and three little strings of pearls that once had been her mother's. In her amber hair a single white rose nestles sleepily.

Standing erect before her glass, she contemplates herself in silence: marks the snowy loveliness of her neck and arms, her slender

hands (on one of which Guy's ring is sparkling brilliantly), her rippling yellow hair in all its unstudied sleekness, the tender exquisite face rose-flushed, and looking gladly upon it all—for very love of it—stoops forward and presses a kiss upon the delicate beauty that smiles back upon her from the mirror.

'How do I look, Nurse?' she asks, turning with a whimsical grace to the woman who is regarding her with loving admiration. 'Shall we captivate our cousin?'

'Ay, so I think, my dear,' replies Nurse quietly. 'Were you willing, my beauty, I'm nigh sure you could coax the birds off the bushes.'

'You are an old dear,' says Miss Chesney tenderly, pressing her own cheek, soft with youth's down, against the wrinkled one near her. 'But I must go and show myself to Taffy.'

So saying, she opens the door, and trips away from Mrs. Tipping's adoring eyes, down the corridor, until she stops at Taffy's door.

'Taffy!'

'Yes.' The answer comes in muffled tones.

'May I come in?'

'Yes,' still more muffled.

Turning the handle of the door, Lilian enters, to find Mr. Musgrave in his shirt sleeves before a long mirror, struggling with his hair, which is combed straight over his forehead.

'It won't come right,' he says, casting a heart-rending glance at Lilian, who laughs with most reprehensible cruelty, considering the situation.

'I am glad to find you are not quite suffocated,' she says. From your tone, I prepared myself—outside—for the worst. Here, bend your head, you hopeless boy, and I will do it for you.'

Taffy kneeling before her submissively, she performs her task deftly—successfully—and thereby restores peace once more to the bosom of the dejected Dragoon.

'You should hire me as your valet,' she says, lightly; 'when you are away from me, I am afraid to think of all the sufferings you must undergo. Are you easier in your mind now, Taffy?'

'Oh! I say! what a swell you are!' says that young man, when he is sufficiently recovered to glance around. 'I call that rig-out down-right fetching. Where did you get that from?'

'Straight from Mons. Worth,' returns Lilian with pardonable pride, when one remembers what a success she is, drawing up her slim young figure to its fullest height, and letting her white hands fall clasped before her, as she

poses for well-earned admiration. 'Is not it pretty? And doesn't it fit like a glove?'

'It does. It gives you really a tolerably good figure,' with all a brother's calm impertinence, while examining her critically. 'You have got yourself up regardless, so I suppose you mean mischief.'

'Well, if this doesn't soften his heart, nothing will,' replies Miss Chesney vainly, regarding her velvet, and alluding, as Musgrave well knows, to her cousin Archibald. 'You really think I look nice, Taffy? You think I am *chic?*'

'I do indeed. I'm not a judge of women's clothing, but I like black velvet, and when I have a wife she shall wear nothing else. I would say more in your favour, but that I fear over much praise might have a bad effect upon you, and cause you to die of your "own dear loveliness."'

'*Méchant!*' says Lilian, with a charming pout. 'Never mind, I know you admire me intensely.'

'Have I not said so in the plainest Queen's English? But that time has fatally revealed to me the real character of the person standing in those costly garments, I feel I should fall madly in love with you to-night.'

'Silly child!'—turning up her small nose with immeasurable disdain—'do you think I would deign to accept your boyish homage? No—I like *men!* Indeed'—with disgraceful affectation—'I think it my duty to warn you not to waste time burning your foolish fingers at *my* shrine.'

She moves him aside with one small finger, the better to see how charming she is in another glass. This one reveals to her all the sweetness she has seen before—and something more. Scarcely has she glanced into it, when

her complexion, that a moment since was a soft and lovely pink, changes suddenly, and flames into a deep crimson.

There, at the farthest end of the long room reflected in the glass—staring back at her—coatless, motionless, with a brush suspended from each hand, stands a man, lost in wonder and most flattering astonishment.

Miss Chesney, turning round with a start, finds that this vision is not belonging to the other world, but is a real, *bonâ fide* creature of flesh and blood—a young man, tall, broad-shouldered, and very dark.

For a full minute they stare silently at each other, oppressed with thoughts widely different in character, while Taffy remains blissfully ignorant of the situation, being now engaged in a desperate conflict with a refractory tie. Then one of the brushes falls from the stranger's hands, and the spell is broken. Miss

Chesney, turning impetuously, proceeds to pour out the vials of her wrath upon Taffy.

'I think you might have told me,' she says, in clear angry tones, casting upon him a glance meant to wither. But Mr. Musgrave distinctly refuses to be withered.

'Eh? What? *By Jove!*' he says vaguely, as the awful truth dawns upon him. Meanwhile Lilian sweeps majestically to the door, her velvets trailing behind her. All her merry kittenish ways have disappeared; she walks as a young queen might, who has been grossly affronted in open court.

'Give you my honour I quite forgot him,' murmurs Taffy, from the spot where he is rooted through sheer dismay. His tones are dismal in the extreme, but Miss Chesney disdains to hear or argue, and, going out, closes the door with much determination behind her. The stranger, suppressing a smile, stoops to

pick up the fallen brush, and the scene is at an end.

Down the stairs, full of vehement indignation, goes Lilian, thoughts crowding upon her thick and heavy. Could anything be more unfortunate! Just when she had got herself up in the most effective style; just when she had hoped, with the aid of this velvet gown, to make a pleasing and dignified *entrée* into his presence in the drawing-room below—she has been led into making his acquaintance in Taffy's bedroom! Oh! horror! She has been face to face with him in his shirt-sleeves, with his odious brushes in his hands, and a stare of undeniable surprise upon his hateful face! Oh! it is insupportable!

And what was it she said to Taffy? What did she do? Hastily her mind travels backward to the conversation that has just taken place.

First, *she combed Taffy's hair.* Oh! miserable girl! She closes two azure eyes with two slender fingers from the light of day, as this thought occurs to her. Then, she smirked at her own graceless image in Taffy's glass, and made all sorts of conceited remarks about her personal appearance, and then she said she hoped to subjugate '*him.*' What 'him' could there be but this one? and of course he knows it. Oh! unhappy young woman!

As for Taffy, bad, bad boy that he is, never to give her a hint. Vengeance surely is in store for him. What right had he to forget? If there is one thing she detests it is a person devoid of tact. If there is one thing she could adore, it would be the power to shake the wretched Taffy out of his shoes.

What is there left to her but to gain her room, plead bad headache, and spend the remainder of the evening in retirement? In this

mood she gains the drawing-room door and, hesitating before it, thinks better of the solitary-confinement idea, and, entering the room seats herself in a cosy chair, and prepares to meet her fate with admirable calmness.

Dinner is ready—waiting—and still no Archibald. Then there is a step in the hall, the door is thrown open, and he enters, as much hurried as it is possible for a well-bred young man to be, in this nineteenth century.

Lady Chetwoode instantly says with old-fashioned grace, the sweeter that it is somewhat obsolete:

'Lilian, permit me to introduce to you your cousin, Archibald Chesney.'

Whereupon Lilian bows coldly and refuses to meet her cousin's eyes, while kind Lady Chetwoode thinks it is a little stiff of the child, and most unlike her not to shake hands with her own kin.

An awkward pause is almost inevitable, when Taffy says out loud, to no one in particular, but with much gusto :

'How odd it is they should never have seen each other until now!' after which he goes into silent agonies of merriment over his own wit, until brought to his senses by an annihilating glance from Lilian.

The dinner hour is remarkable for nothing except Lilian's silence. This, being so utterly unexpected, is worthy of note. After dinner, when the men gain the drawing-room, Archibald coming over, deliberately pushes aside Miss Chesney's velvet skirts, and seats himself on the low ottoman beside her with modest determination.

Miss Chesney raising her eyes regards him curiously.

He is tall, and eminently gloomy in appearance. His hair is of a rare blackness, his

eyes are dark, so is his skin. His eyebrows are slightly arched, which gives him an air of melancholy protest against the world in general. His nose is of the high and mighty order, that comes under the denomination of aquiline, or hooked, as may suit you best. Before his arrival Cyril used to tell Lilian that if Nature had meant him for anything it was to act as brigand in a private theatre; and Lilian, now calling to mind this remark, acknowledges the truth of it, and almost laughs in the face of her dark-browed cousin. Nevertheless she refrains from outward mirth, which is wisdom on her part, as ridicule is his *bêtenoire*.

Despite the extreme darkness of his complexion he is unmistakably handsome, though somewhat discontented in expression. Why, no one knows. He is rich; courted, as are all young men with a respectable rent-roll, and might have made many a titled *débutante* Mrs.

Chesney had he so chosen. He has not even a romantic love affair to fall back upon as an excuse for his dejection—no unfortunate attachment has arisen to sour his existence. Indeed, it is seldom the owner of landed property has to complain on this score, all such luxuries being reserved for the poor of the earth.

Archibald Chesney's gloom, which is becoming if anything, does not sink deeper than his skin. It gives a certain gentleness to his face, and prevents the ignorant from guessing ne is one of the wildest, maddest young men about London. Lilian, regarding him with quiet scrutiny, decides he is good to look at, and that his eyes are peculiarly large and dark.

'Are you angry with me for what happened upstairs?' he asks, gently, after a pause spent in as earnest an examination of her, as any she has bestowed upon him.

'Upstairs?' says Lilian, with raised brows of inquiry and carefully studied ignorance.

'I mean my unfortunate *rencontre* with you in Musgrave's room.'

'Oh dear no,' with clear denial. 'I seldom grow angry over *trifles*. I have not thought of it since.' She utters her fib bravely, the truth being, that all during dinner she has been consumed with shame.

'Have you not? *I* have. I have been utterly miserable ever since you bestowed that terrible look upon me when your eyes first met mine. Won't you let me explain my presence there? I think if you do you will forgive me.'

'It was not your fault; there is nothing about which you need apologise,' says Lilian; but her tone is more cordial, and there is the faintest dimpling of a smile around her mobile lips.

'Nevertheless I hate myself in that I caused

you a moment's uneasiness,' says Mr. Chesney, that being the amiable word he employs for her ill-temper. 'I shall be discontented until I tell you the truth, so pray let me.'

'Then tell it,' says Lilian.

'I have a man, a perfect treasure, who can do all that man can possibly do, who is in fact faultless—but for one small weakness.'

'And that is?'

'Like Mr. Stiggins his vanity is—brandy hot. Now and then he drinks more of it than is good for him, though to do him justice not very often. Once in six months, regular as clockwork, he gets hopelessly drunk, and just now the time being up, he, of course, chose this particular day to make his half-yearly exhibition of himself, and having imbibed brandy *ad lib.* forgot to bring himself and my traps to Chetwoode in time for the first dressing bell.'

'What a satisfactory sort of servant!'

'He is, very, when he is sober—absolutely invaluable. And then his little mistakes occur so seldom. But I wish he had not chosen this night of all others in which to play me false. I don't know what I should have done had I not thrown myself upon Musgrave's mercy and borrowed his brushes and combs, and implements of war generally. As it was, I had almost given up hope of being able to reach the drawing-room at all to-night, when just at the last moment my "treasure" arrived with my things and—any amount of concealed spirits. Do I bore you with my explanation? It is very good of you to listen so patiently, but I should have been too unhappy had I been prevented from telling you all this.'

'I think, after all, it is I should explain my presence in that room,' says Lilian with a gay, irresistible laugh that causes Guy, who is at the

other end of the room, to lift his head and regard her anxiously.

He is sitting near Florence on a sofa (or rather, to speak more correctly, she is sitting near him), and is looking bored and *gêné*. Her laugh pains him unaccountably; glancing next at her companion he marks the still admiration in the dark face as it gazes into her fair one. Already—*already*—he is surely *empressé*.

'But the fact is,' Lilian is saying, 'I have always been in the habit of visiting Taffy's room before he has quite finished his dressing, to see if there be any little final touch required that I might give him. Did you meet him in London?'

'No; never saw him until a couple of hours ago. Very nice little fellow, I should say. Cousin of yours?'

'Yes; isn't he a pet?' says Lilian, eagerly, always glad to hear praise of her youthful

Plunger. 'There are very few like him. He is my nearest relative, and you can't think how I love that boy.'

'"That boy" is, I should say, older than you are.'

'Ye—es,' doubtfully, 'so he says; about a year I think. Not that it matters,' says Miss Chesney, airily, 'as in reality I am any number of years older than he is. He is nothing but a big child, so I have to look after him.'

'You have, I suppose, constituted yourself his mother?' asks Archibald, intensely amused at her pretty assumption of maternity.

'Yes,' with a grave nod, 'or his elder sister, just as I feel it my duty at the moment, to pet or scold him.'

'Happy Taffy!'

'Not that he gives me much trouble. He is a very good boy generally.'

'He is a very handsome boy at all events;

you have reason to be proud of your child.—I am your cousin also.'

'Yes.'

'Yes.'

A pause, after which Mr. Chesney says meekly:

'I suppose you would not take me as a second son?'

'I think not,' says Lilian, laughing; 'you are much too important a person and far too old to be either petted or scolded.'

'That is very hard lines, isn't it? You might say anything you liked to me, and I am almost positive I should not resent it. And if you will be so kind as to turn your eyes on me once more I think you will acknowledge I am not so very old.'

'Too old for me to take in hand. I doubt you would be an unruly member—a *mauvais sujet*—a disgrace to my teaching. I should

lose caste. At dinner I saw you frown, and frowns'—with a coquettishly plaintive sigh—'frighten me!'

'Do you imagine me brutal enough to frown upon my mother? and such a mother!'

'Nevertheless I cannot undertake your reformation. You should remember you are scarcely in my good books. Are you not a usurper in my eyes? Have you not stolen from me my beloved Park?'

'Ah! true. But you can have it back again you know,' returns he in a low tone, half jest, though there is a faint under-current—that is almost earnestness—running through it.

At this moment Lady Chetwoode saves Lilian the embarrassment of a reply.

'Sing us something, darling,' she says.

And Lilian, rising, trails her soft skirts after her across the room, and sitting down at

the piano commences 'Barb'ra Allen,' sweetly, gravely, tenderly, as is her wont.

Guy's gaze follows her. The pure though *piquante* face, the golden hair, the rich old-fashioned texture of the gown, all combine to make a lovely picture lovelier. The words of the song make his heart throb, and bring to life a certain memory of earlier days, when on the top of a high wall he first heard her singing it.

Pathetically, softly, she sings it, without affectation or pretence of any kind, and having finished, still lets her fingers wander idly over the notes (drawing from them delicate minor harmonies that sadden the listener) whilst the others applaud.

Guy alone being silent, she glances at him presently with a smile full of kindliness, that claims and obtains an answering smile in return.

'Have I ever seen that gown on you before?' he asks, after a pause.

'No. This dress is without doubt an eminent success as everybody admires it. No; you never saw it before. Do you like it?'

'More than I can say. Lilian, you have formed your opinion of your cousin, and—you like him?'

'Very much indeed. He is handsome, *débonnaire*, all that may be desired, and—he quite likes Taffy.'

'A passport to your favour,' says Chetwoode, smiling. 'Though no one could help liking the boy.' Then his eyes seeking her hands once more, fasten upon the right one, and he sees the ring he had placed upon the third finger a few hours before now glistens bravely upon the second.

The discovery causes him a pang so keen that involuntarily he draws himself up to his

full height and condemns himself as a superstitious fool. As if she divines his thought—though in reality she knows nothing of it—Lilian says, gazing admiringly at the glittering trinket in question:

'I think your ring grows prettier and prettier every time I look at it. But it would not stay on the finger you chose: while I was dressing it fell off, so, fearing to lose it, I slipped it upon this one. It looks as well, does it not?'

'Yes,' says Chetwoode, though all the time he is wishing with all his heart it had not fallen from the engagement finger. When we love we grow fearful; and with fear there is torment.

'Why don't you ask Florence to sing?' asks Lilian, suddenly.

Archibald Chesney has risen and lounged over to the piano, and now is close beside her.

To Guy's jealous ears it seems as though the remark was made to rid her of his presence.

'Because I detest French songs,' he answers somewhat sharply—Miss Beauchamp being addicted to such foreign music.

'Do you?' says Lilian, laughing at his tone, which she fully understands, and straightway sings one (the gayest, brightest, most nonsensical to be found in her *répertoire*) in her sweet fresh voice, glancing at him with a comical challenge in her eyes every time the foolish yet tender refrain occurs.

When she has finished she says to him saucily:

'Well, Sir Guy?'

And he answers:

'I am vanquished, utterly convinced. I confess I now like French songs as well as any others.'

'I like them ten times better,' says Archi-

bald, impulsively, 'when they are sung by you. There is a *verve*, a gaiety about them that other songs lack. Have you any more? do you know any of Gounod's? I like them, though they are of such a different style.'

'They are rather beyond me,' says Lilian, laughing. 'But hear this, it is one of Béranger's, very simply set, but I think pretty.'

This time she sings to *him*—unmistakably—soft little Norman love-song, full of grace and tenderest entreaty, bestowing upon him all the beguiling smiles she had a moment since given exclusively to her guardian, until at length Sir Guy, muttering 'coquette' to his own heart, turns aside, leaving Chesney master of the field.

Lilian, turning from her animated discussion with Archibald, follows his departing footsteps with her eyes, in which lies a faintly malicious smile; an expression full of suppressed enjoyment curves her lips; she is evidently satisfied

at his abrupt retreat, and continues her interrupted conversation with her cousin in still more joyous tones. Perhaps this is how she means to fulfil her mysterious threat of 'showing' Sir Guy.

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CHAPTER XV.

I will gather thee, he cried,
 Rosebud brightly blowing!
Then I'll sting thee, it replied,
And you'll quickly start aside
 With the prickle glowing.
Rosebud, rosebud, rosebud red,
 Rosebud brightly blowing!

GOETHE—*translated.*

'NURSE, wash my hair,' says Lilian, entering her nurse's sanctum, which is next her own, one lovely morning early in September when

Dew is on the lea,
And tender buds are fretting to be free.

The fickle sun is flinging its broad beams far and near, now glittering upon the ivied towers, now dancing round the chimney tops, now fleck-

ing with gold the mullioned windows. Its brightness is as a smile from the departing summer, the sweeter that it grows rarer every hour; its merry rays spread and lengthen, the wind grows softer, balmier, beneath its influence; it is as the very heart of lazy July.

> And on the woods and on the deep
> The smile of Heaven lay.
> It seemed as if the day were one
> Sent from beyond the skies,
> Which shed to earth above the sun
> A light of Paradise.

There is an 'inviolable quietness' in all the air.

Some late roses have grown, and cluster round Lilian's window; stooping out, she kisses and caresses them, speaking to them as though they were (as indeed they are) her dear friends, when Nurse's voice recalls her to the present, and the inner room.

'La, my dear,' says Mrs. Tipping, 'it is only four days since I washed it before.'

'Never mind, Ninny, wash it again. To-day is so delicious, with such a dear little breeze and such a prodigality of sun, that I cannot resist it. You know how I love running through the air with my hair wet, and feeling the wind rushing through it. And Nurse, be sure now'— coaxingly—'you put plenty of soda in the water.'

'What, and rot all your pretty locks? Not I, indeed!' says Nurse, with much determination.

'But you must; you will now, won't you?' in a wheedling tone. 'It never stands properly out from my head unless it is full of soda.'

'An' what, I wonder, would your poor mamma say to me if she could see me spoiling your bonny hair this day, an' it the very colour of her own? No, no; I cannot indeed. It goes against my conscience as it were; go get some-

one else to wash it, not me; it would sadden me.'

'If you won't wash it, no one else shall,' pouts Lilian. And when Lilian pouts she looks so lovely, and so naughty, and so irresistible, that instead of scolding her for ill-temper, everyone instantly gives in to her. Nurse gives in as she has done to her little mistress's pout ever since the latter was four years old, and forthwith produces soap and water, and plenty of soda.

The long yellow hair being at length washed, combed out carefully, and brushed until it hangs heavily all down her back, Lilian administers a soft little kiss to her nurse as reward for her trouble, and runs delightedly down the stairs, straight into the open air, without hat, or covering of any kind for her head.

The garden is listless and sleepy. The

bees are silent, the flowers are nodding drowsily, wakened into some sort of life by the teazing wind that sighs and laughs around them unceasingly. Lilian plucks a blossom here and there, and scatters far and near the gaudy butterfly in very wantonness of enjoyment, while the wooing wind whistles through her hair, drying it softly, lovingly, until at last some of its pristine gloss returns to it, and its gold shines with redoubled vigour beneath the sun's rays.

As she saunters, revelling—as one from Fairyland might revel—in the warmth and gladness of the great heathen god, she sings; and to Guy in his distant study the sound and the words come all too distinctly:

'Why shouldn't I love my love?
Why shouldn't he love me?
Why shouldn't he come after me,
Since love to all is free?'

Beneath his window she pauses and, finally running up the steps of the balcony, peers in, full of an idle curiosity.

Sir Guy's den is the most desirable room in the house—the cosiest, the oddest, the most interesting. Looking at it, one guesses instinctively how addicted to all pretty things the owner is, from women down to less costly *bijouterie*.

Lovely landscapes adorn the walls side by side with Greutze-like faces, angelic in expression—nunlike in appearance. There are a few portraits of beauties well known in the London and Paris worlds, frail as they are fair, false as they are *piquante*, whose garments (to do him justice) are distinctly decent, perhaps more so than their characters. But then—indecency has gone out of fashion.

There are two or three lounges, some priceless statuettes, a few bits of *bric-a-brac*

worth their weight in gold, innumerable yellow-backed volumes by Paul de Kock and his fellows, chairs of all shapes and sizes, one more comfortable and inviting than the other, enough meerschaum pipes, and cigarette holders, and tobacco stands to stock a small shop, a couple of dogs snoozing peacefully upon the hearth-rug, under the mistaken impression that a fire is burning in the grate, a writing-table, and before it Sir Guy. These are the principal things that attract Lilian's attention, as she gazes in, with her silken hair streaming behind her in the light breeze.

On the wall she cannot see, there are a few hunters by Herring, a copy of Millais' 'Yes or No'; a good deal of stable-ware; and beneath them on a table, more pipes, cheroots, and boxes of cigars, mixed up with straw-covered bottles of perfume, thrust rather ignominiously into a corner.

A shadow falling across the paper on which he is writing, Guy raises his head, to see a fairy vision staring in at him—a little slight figure, clothed in airy black with daintiest lace frillings at the throat and wrists, and with a wealth of golden hair brought purposely all over her face, letting only the laughing sapphire eyes, blue as the skies above her, gleam out from amongst it.

'Open the door, oh Hermit, and let a poor wanderer in,' croons this fairy in properly saddened tones.

Rising gladly, he throws wide the window to her, whereupon she steps into the room still with her face hidden.

'You come?' asks he, in a deferential tone.

'To know what you are doing, and what can keep you indoors this exquisite day. Do you remember how late in the season it is?

and that you are slighting Nature? She will be angry, and will visit you with storms and drooping flowers, if you persist in flouting her. Come out. Come out.'

'Who are you?' asks Guy. 'Are you Flora?' He parts her hair gently and throws it back over her shoulders. 'I thought you a nymph—a fairy—a small goddess, and——'

'And behold it is only Lilian! Naughty Lilian! Are you disappointed, Sir Guardian?' She laughs, and running her fingers through all her amber locks, spreading them out on either side of her like a silken veil, that extends as far as her arms can reach. She is lovely, radiant, bright as the day itself, fairer than the lazy flowers.

'What a child you are,' says Guy with some discontent in his voice, feeling how far, *far* younger than he, she is.

'Am I? Nonsense! Nurse says,' going to

a glass, and surveying herself with critical eyes, 'Nurse says I am a "very well grown girl of my age."' Almost unconsciously she assumes Nurse's pompous though adoring manner to such perfection that Guy laughs heartily.

'That is right, Guardy,' says Miss Lilian with bland encouragement, 'I like to hear you laugh; of late you have grown almost as discontented to look at as my cousin. Have I amused you?'

'Yes—your assumption of Mrs. Tipping was admirable. Though I am not sure that I agree with her—you are not very much grown, are you? I don't think you are up to my shoulder.'

'What a tarradiddle!' says Lilian. 'Get off that table directly and let me convince you.'

As Guy obeys her and draws himself up to his liberal six feet one, she goes to him and

lays her soft head against his arm, only to find he—not she—is right; she is half an inch below his shoulder. Standing so, it takes Guy all he knows to keep himself from throwing his arms round her, and straining her to the heart that beats for her so passionately—that beats for her alone.

'You have raised your shoulder,' she says, most unfairly, 'it wasn't half so high yesterday; you shouldn't cheat!—What a charming room yours is! I quite envy it to you. And the flowers are so well selected—who adorns your den so artistically? Florence? But of course it is the invaluable Florence; I might have known. That good creature always does the correct thing!'

'I think it is the mother sees to it,' replies he, gently.

'Oh, is it? Kind Auntie! What a delicious little bit of blue! Forget-me-not is it? How

innocent it looks, and babyish, in its green leaves. May I rob you, Sir Guy? I should like a spray or two for my dress.'

'You may have anything you wish that I can give you.'

'What a noble offer!—Are you going to waste much more time over your tiresome letters?' glancing with pretty impertinence at the half-finished sheets lying on the table near her; 'I suppose they are all business, or love, or such-like rubbish! Well, good-bye, Guardy, I must go and finish the drying of my hair; you will find me in the garden when yon come to the end of your last *billet-doux*.'

So saying, she trips away from him down the handsome oak-panelled room, and disappears through the doorway that leads into the hall.

Where she goes the sunshine seems to follow her. To Guy's fancy it appears as though

a shadow has fallen suddenly into the room, when the last glimpse of her yellow hair has vanished out of sight. With a rather abstracted air he betakes himself once more to his writing, and tries to forget her.

But somehow the impetus that urged him on half an hour ago is wanting; the spur to his industry has lost its sharpness; and presently, throwing down his pen with an impatient gesture, he acknowledges himself no longer in the mood for work.

What a child she is! Again the thought occurs to him; yet with what power to torture. To-day all sweetness, and honeyed gaiety, to-morrow indifferent, if not actually repellant. She is an anomaly—a little frail lily beset with thorns that puts forth its stings to wound, and probe, and madden, when least expected.

Only yesterday—after an hour's inward conflict—he had convinced himself of her

love for her cousin Archibald, with such evident pleasure did she receive his very marked attentions. And now—to-day—surely if she loved Chesney, her eyes could not have dwelt so kindly upon another, as they did a few minutes since upon her guardian. With what a pretty grace she had demanded that blue forget-me-not, and placed it in the bosom of her dress! With what evident sincerity she had hinted at her wish to see him in the garden when his work should be over. Perhaps —perhaps——

Of late a passionate desire to tell her of the affection with which she has inspired him consumes him daily—hourly; but a fear, a sad certainty of disappointment to follow on his declaration, has hitherto checked the words that so often tremble on his lips. Now the unwonted gentleness of her manner tempts him to follow her, and put his fate 'to the touch,'

and so end all the jealous anguish and heart-burnings that torment him all day long.

Quitting his sanctum, he crosses the hall, and enters the drawing-room, where he finds Florence alone.

She is, as usual, bending industriously over her crewel work; the parrot's tail is now in a high state of perfection, not a colour in the rainbow being missing from it. Seeing Guy, she raises her head and smiles upon him sweetly, blandly, invitingly.

'Where is Lilian?' asks Guy abruptly, with all the tactless truthfulness of a man when he has one absorbing object in view.

Miss Beauchamp's bland smile freezes on her lips, and shows itself no more. She makes answer nevertheless in an unmoved tone:

'Where she always is, in the garden with her cousin, Mr. Chesney.'

'Always?' says Guy, lightly, though in

reality his face has grown suddenly pale, and his fingers clinch involuntarily.

'Well,' in her unchangeable placid staccato voice, 'generally. He seems very *épris* with her, and she appears to receive his admiration favourably. Have you not noticed it?'

'I cannot say I have.'

'No?'—incredulously—'how extraordinary! But men are proverbially dull in the observation of such matters as love-affairs. Some indeed,' with slow meaning, 'are positively *blind*.'

She lays her work upon the table before her and examines it critically. She does not so much as glance at her victim, though secretly enjoying the knowledge that he is writhing beneath the lash.

'Chesney would be a good match for her,' says Guy with the calmness of despair. But his calmness does not deceive his companion.

'Very good. The Park I am told is even larger than Chetwoode. You, as her guardian, should, I think, put carefully before her all the advantages to be derived from such a marriage.'

Here she smooths out her parrot, and turning her head slightly to one side, wonders whether a little more crimson in the wings would not make them look more attractive. No, perhaps not—they are gaudy enough already—though one often sees—a—parrot—with——

'I don't believe mere money would have weight with Lilian,' Guy breaks in upon her all-important reverie, with a visible effort.

'No? Perhaps not. But then the Park is her old home, and she, who professes such childish adoration for it, might possibly like to regain it. You really should speak to her, Guy. She should not be allowed to throw

away such a brilliant chance, when a few well-chosen words might bias her in the right direction.'

Guy makes no reply, but stepping on to the balcony outside, walks listlessly away, his heart in a tumult of fear and regret, while Miss Beauchamp, calmly, and with a certain triumph, goes on contentedly with her work. A nail in Lilian's coffin has, she hopes, been driven, and sews her hopes into the canvas beneath her hand, as long ago the Parisian women knitted their terrible revenge and cruel longings into their children's socks, whilst all the flower and beauty and chivalry of France fell beneath the fatal guillotine.

Guy, wandering aimlessly, full of dismal thought, follows out mechanically his first idea, and turns in the direction of the garden, the spot so beloved by his false, treacherous little mistress.

In the distance he sees her; she is standing motionless in the centre of a grass plot, while behind her Chesney is busily engaged tying back her yellow hair with a broad piece of black ribbon she has evidently given him for the purpose. He has all her rich tresses gathered together in one, and is lingering palpably over his task. In his coat is placed conspicuously the blue forget-me-not begged of Guy by Lilian only a few minutes ago as though her heart were set upon its possession.

'Coquette,' mutters Chetwoode between his teeth.

'Not done yet?' asks the coquette at this moment of her cousin, giving her head a little impatient shake.

'Yes, just done,' finishing up in a hurry the somewhat curious bow he is making.

'Well, now run,' says Lilian, 'and do as I

bade you. I shall be here on this spot when you return. You know how I hate waiting, so don't be long—do you hear?'

'Does that mean you will be impatient to see me again?'

'Of course,' laughing. 'I shall be *dying* to see you again, longing, pining for your return, thinking every minute an hour until you come back to me.'

Thus encouraged, Archibald quickly vanishes, and Guy comes slowly up to her.

'I think you needn't have put that flower in Chesney's coat,' he says in an aggrieved tone. 'I had no idea you meant it for his adornment.'

'Is it in his coat?' As she makes this mean reply she blushes a rich warm crimson, so full of consciousness that it drives Guy absolutely wild with jealousy. 'Yes, now I remember,' she says with an assumption of indifference, 'he

either took it from me, or asked me for it, I quite forget which.'

'Do you?'

'I do,' resenting his manner, which borders on disbelief, and is in her eyes highly objectionable. 'Why should I trouble myself to recollect such trifles?'

After a pause, and with a distinct effort, Chetwoode says:

'You were foolishly prejudiced against your cousin before his arrival. I am glad you have learned to be civil to him.'

'More than that, I have learned to like him very much indeed. He is quite charming, and not in the least *exigeant*, or *difficile*,' this rather pronounced. 'Besides, he is my cousin, and the master of my old home. Whenever I think of the dear Park I naturally think of him, until now they are both associated in my mind; this adds to my liking.'

Guy's heart sinks within him as he remembers Florence's words, and now hears Lilian's own confession. He glances at her despairingly. She is picking a flower to pieces, and as she does so a little soft sigh escapes her. Is it for her lost home? Is she already dreaming of an hour when she may return to it once more as its happy mistress? Is she mercenary, as Florence hinted? or is it homesickness that is tempting her? or can it be that at heart she loves this cousin?

'It is the same with all women,' he says bitterly; 'the last comer is always the best, the newest face the dearest.'

'I do not understand you'—with cold reproof; 'surely you are wandering from the subject: we were saying nothing about last comers, or new faces. If you happen to be in a bad temper, Sir Guy, I really think it a little hard that you should come here to inflict it upon me.'

'I am not in a bad temper'—indignantly.

'No? It seems very like it,' says Miss Chesney. 'I can't bear cross people, they are always saying unpleasant as well as unmeaning things. New faces indeed! I really wish Archibald would come; he is always agreeable, and never starts distasteful topics; ah, here he is! Archie, how long you have been, I thought you were never coming! Sir Guy is in one of his terrible moods, and has frightened me out of my life. I was in danger of being lectured off the face of the earth. No woman should be pitied, but she that has a guardian! You have come to my rescue barely in time; another minute and you would have found only a lifeless Lilian.'

Sir Guy, black with rage, turns aside. Archibald, ignorant of the storm brewing, sinks beside her contentedly upon the grass.

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CHAPTER XVI.

Oh, spirit of love, how fresh and quick thou art.—SHAKESPEARE.

IT is the gloaming—that tenderest, fondest, most pensive time of all the day. As yet, night crouches on the borders of the land, reluctant to throw its dark shadow over the still smiling earth, while day is slowly, sadly receding. There is a hush over everything; above, on their leafy perches, the birds are nestling, and crooning their cradle songs; the gay breeze, lazy with its exertions of the day, has fallen asleep, so that the very grasses are silent and unstirred. An owl in the distance is hooting mournfully. There

is a serenity on all around, an all-pervading stillness that moves one to sadness, and fills unwittingly the eyes with tears. It is the peace that follows upon grief, as though the busy world, that through all the heat and turmoil of the day has been weeping and groaning in anguish, has now for a few short hours found rest.

The last roses of summer in Mrs. Arlington's garden, now that those gay young sparks the bees have deserted them, are growing drowsy, and hang their heavy heads dejectedly. Two or three dissipated butterflies, fond of late hours and tempted by the warmth, still float gracefully through the air.

Cecilia, coming down the garden path, rests her arms upon her wicket gate and looks towards Chetwoode.

She is dressed in an exquisite white cambric fastened at the throat by a bit of lavender ribbon; through her gown here and there are

touches of the same colour; on her head is a ravishing little cap of the mob description, that lends an additional charm to her face, making her seem if possible more womanly, more lovable than ever.

As she leans upon the gate a last yellow sunbeam falls upon her, peeps into her eyes, takes a good-night kiss from her parted lips, and descending slowly, lovingly, crosses her bosom, steals a little sweetness from the white rose dying on her breast, throws a golden shade upon her white gown, and finally dies chivalrously at her feet.

But not for the dead devoted sunbeam does that warm blush grow and mantle on her cheek; not for it do her pulses throb, her heart beat fast. Towards her, in his evening dress, and without his hat, regardless of consequences, comes Cyril, the quickness of his steps betraying a flattering haste. As yet—although many

weeks have come and gone since their first meeting, no actual words of love have been spoken between them; but each knows the other's heart, and has learned that eyes can speak a more eloquent language, can utter tenderer thoughts, than any the lips can frame.

'Again?' says Cecilia, softly, a little wonder a great undisguised gladness, in her soft grey eyes.

'Yes; I could not keep away,' returns he simply.

He does not ask to enter but leans upon the gate from his side, very close to her. Most fair men look well in evening clothes; Cyril looks downright handsome—his blonde moustache seems golden; his blue eyes almost black in the rays of the departing sun; just now those eyes are filled with love and passionate admiration.

Her arms, half bare, with some frail shadowy lace falling over them, look rounded and velvety as a child's in the growing dusk; the fingers of her pretty blue-veined hands are interlaced. Separating them, Cyril takes one hand between both his own and strokes it fondly, silently, yet almost absently.

Suddenly raising his head, he looks at her, his whole heart in his expression, his eyes full of purpose. Instinctively she feels the warmth, the tenderness of his glance, and changes from a calm lily into an expectant rose. Her hand trembles within his, as though meditating flight, and then lies passive as his clasp tightens firmly upon it. Slowly, reluctantly, as though compelled by some hidden force, she turns her averted eyes to his.

'Cecilia,' murmurs he imploringly, and then—and then their lips meet, and they kiss each other solemnly, with a passionate tender-

ness, knowing it is their betrothal they are sealing.

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'I wish I had summoned courage to kiss you a week ago,' he says presently. He is inside the gate now, and seems to have lost in this shamefully short time all the hesitation and modesty that a few minutes ago were so becoming. His arm is round her; even as he makes this rather *risqué* remark, he stoops and embraces her again, without ever having the grace to ask permission, while she (that I should live to say it of Cecilia!) never reproves him.

'Why?' she asks, smiling up at him.

'See how I have wasted seven good days,' returns he, drinking in gladly all the beauty of her face and smile. 'This day last week I might have been as happy as I am now—whereas I was the most miserable wretch alive, the victim of suspense.'

'You bore your misery admirably; had you not told me, I should never have guessed your wretchedness. Besides—how do you know I should have been so kind to you seven long days ago?'

'I know it—because you love me.'

'And how do you know that either?' asks she, with new-born coquetry that sits very sweetly upon her. 'Cyril, when did you begin to love me?'

'The very moment I first saw you.'

'No, no; I do not want compliments from *you*—I want the very honest truth. Tell me.'

'I have told you. The honest truth is this. That morning after your arrival when I restored your terrier to you, I fell in love with you; you little thought then, when I gave your dog into your keeping, I was giving my heart also.'

'No,' in a low soft voice, that somehow has a smile in it, 'how could I—I am glad you loved me always—that there was no time when I was indifferent to you. I think love at first sight must be the sweetest and truest of all.'

'You have the best of it then, have you not?' with a rather forced laugh. 'Not only did I love you from the first moment I saw you, but you are the only woman I ever really cared for; while you,' with some hesitation, and turning his eyes steadily away from hers, 'you—of course—did love—once before.'

'Never!'

The word comes with startling vehemence from between her lips, the new and brilliant gladness of her face dies from it. A little chill shudder runs through all her frame, turning her to stone; drawing herself with determina-

tion from his encircling arms, she stands somewhat away from him.

'It is time I told you my history,' she says, in cold, changed tones, through which quivers a ring of pain, while her face grows suddenly as pale, as impenetrable as when they were yet quite strangers to each other. 'Perhaps when you hear it, you may regret your words of to-night.' There is a doubt, a weariness in her voice that almost angers him.

'Nonsense,' he says, roughly, the better to hide the emotion he feels, 'don't be romantic; nobody commits murder, or petty larceny, or bigamy nowadays, without being found out; unpleasant mysteries, and skeletons in the closet have gone out of fashion. We put all our skeletons in the "Times" now, no matter how we may have to blush for their nakedness. I don't want to hear anything about your life if it makes you unhappy to tell it.'

'It doesn't make me unhappy.'

'But it does. Your face has grown quite white, and your eyes are full of tears. Darling —I won't have you distress yourself for me.'

'I have not committed any of the crimes you mention, or any other particular crime,' returns she with a very wan little smile. 'I have only been miserable ever since I can remember. I have not spoken about myself to anyone for years—except one friend; but now I should like to tell you everything.'

'But not there!' holding out his hands to her reproachfully; 'I don't believe I could hear you if you spoke from such a distance.' There is exactly half a yard of sward between them. 'If you are wilfully bent on driving us both to the verge of melancholy, at least let us meet our fate together.'

Here he steals his arm round her once more,

and thus supported, and with her head upon his shoulder, she commences her short story:

'Perhaps you know my father was a Major in the Scots Greys; your brother knew him—his name was Duncan.'

Cyril starts involuntarily.

'Ah, you start. You too knew him?'

'Yes, slightly.'

'Then,' in a curiously hard voice, 'you knew nothing good of him. Well,' with a sigh, 'no matter; afterwards you can tell me what it was. When I was eighteen he brought me home from school, not that he wanted my society—I was rather in his way than otherwise, and it wasn't a good way—but because he had a purpose in view. One day, when I had been home three months, a visitor came to see us. He was introduced to me by my father. He was young, dark, not ugly, well-mannered,' here she pauses as though to recover breath,

and then breaks out with a passion that shakes all her slight frame, 'but hateful, vile, *loathsome.*'

'My darling, don't go on; I don't want to hear about him,' implores Cyril, anxiously.

'But I must tell you. He possessed that greatest of all virtues in my father's eyes—wealth. He was rich. He admired me—I was very pretty then.—He dared to say he loved me. He asked me to marry him, and—I refused him.'

As though the words are forced from her, she utters them in short, unequal sentences; her lips have turned the colour of death.

'I suppose he went then to my father, and they planned it all between them, because at this time he—that is my father—began to tell me he was in debt, hopelessly, irretrievably in debt. Amongst others, he mentioned certain debts of (so-called) honour, which, if not paid

within a given time, would leave him not only a beggar, but a disgraced one upon the face of the earth; and I believed him. He worked upon my feelings day by day, with pretended tears, with vows of amendment. I don't know,' bitterly, 'what his share of the bargain was to be, but I do know he toiled for it conscientiously. I was young, unusually so for my age, without companions, romantic, impressionable. It seemed to me a grand thing to sacrifice myself and thereby save my father; and if I would only consent to marry Mr. Arlington he had promised not only to avoid dice, but to give up his habits of intemperance. It is an old story, is it not? No doubt you know it by heart, crafty age, and foolish youth, what chance had I? One day I gave in, I said I would marry Mr. Arlington, and he sold me to him three weeks later. We were married.'

Here her voice fails her again, and a little moan of agonised recollection escapes her. Cyril, clasping her still closer to him, presses a kiss upon her brow. At the sweet contact of his lips she sighs, and two large tears gathering in her eyes roll slowly down her cheeks.

'A week after my wretched marriage,' she goes on, 'I discovered accidentally my father had lied to me and tricked me. His circumstances were not so bad as he had represented to me, and it was on the condition he was to have a certain income from Mr. Arlington yearly he had persuaded me to marry him. He did not long enjoy it. He died,' slowly, 'two months afterwards. Of my life with—my husband I shall not tell you; the recital would only revolt you. Only to think of it now makes me feel deadly ill, and often from my dreams as I live it all over again, I start, cold with horror and disgust. It did not last

long, which was merciful—six months after our marriage he eloped with an actress and went to Vienna.'

'The blackguard—the scoundrel!' says Cyril between his teeth, drawing his breath sharply.

'I never saw him again. In a little while I received tidings of his death—he had been stabbed in a brawl in some drinking-house, and only lived a few hours after it. And I was once more free.'

She pauses and involuntarily stretches forth both her hands into the twilight, as one might who long in darkness, being thrust into the full light of day, seeks to grasp and retain it.

'When I heard of his death,' she says, turning to Cyril, and speaking in a clear intense tone, 'I *laughed!* For the first time for many months I laughed aloud! I declared

my thankfulness in a distinct voice. My heart beat with honest, undisguised delight when I knew I should never see him again, should never in all the years to come shiver and tremble in his hated presence. He was dead, and I was heartily glad of it.'

She stops in terrible agitation. An angry fire gleams in her large grey eyes. She seems for the moment to have utterly forgotten Cyril's nearness, as in memory she lives over again all the detested past. Cyril lays his hand lightly upon her shoulder, her eyes meet his, and then the anger dies from them. She sighs heavily and then goes on:

'After that I don't know what happened for a long time, because I got brain-fever, and but for one friend, who all through had done his best for me, I should have died. He and his sister nursed me through it, and brought me back to life again, but,' mournfully, 'they

could not restore to me my crushed youth, my ruined faith, my girlish hopes. A few months had changed me from a mere child into a cold, unloving woman.'

'Don't say that,' says Cyril, gently.

'Until now,' returns she, looking at him with eyes full of the most intense affection; 'now all is different.'

'Beloved, how you have suffered,' he says, pressing her head down again upon his breast, and caressing with loving fingers her rich hair. 'But it is all over, and if I can make you so, you shall be happy in the future. And your one friend? Who was he?'

She hesitates perceptibly, and a blush creeping up dies her pale face crimson.

'Perhaps I know,' says Cyril, an unaccountable misgiving at his heart. 'Was it Colonel Trant? Do not answer me if you do not wish it,' very gently.

'Yes, it was he. There is no reason why I should not answer you.'

'No?'

'No.'

'He asked Guy to let you have the cottage?'

'Yes; I had wearied of everything and, though by some chance I had come in for all Mr. Arlington's property, I only cared to go away and hide myself somewhere where I should find quiet and peace. I tried several places, but I was always restless until I came here.' She smiles faintly.

Cyril, after a pause, says hesitatingly:

'Cecilia, did you ever care for—for—Trant?'

'Never; did you imagine that? I never cared for anyone but you; I never shall again. And you, Cyril,' the tears rushing thickly to her eyes, 'do you still think you can love me,

the daughter of one bad man, the wife of another? I can hardly think myself as good as other women when I remember all the hateful scenes I have passed through.'

'I shall treat you to a crowning scene if you ever dare say that again,' says Cyril, whose spirits are rising now she has denied having any affection for Trant. 'And if every relation you ever had was as bad as bad could be I should adore you all the same. I can't say any more.'

'You needn't,' returns she, laughing a little. 'Oh, Cyril, how sweet it is to be beloved, to me especially, who never yet (until now) had any love offered me; at least,' correcting herself hastily, 'any I cared to accept!'

'But you had a lover?' asks he, earnestly.

'Yes, one.'

'Trant again?' letting his teeth close somewhat sharply on his under lip.

'Yes.'

'Cecilia, I am afraid you liked that fellow once. Come, confess it.'

'No indeed, not in the way you mean. But in every other way more than I can tell you. I should be the most ungrateful wretch alive if it were otherwise. As a true friend, I love him.'

'How dare you use such a word to anyone but me?' says Cyril, bending to smile into her eyes. 'I warn you not to do it again, or I shall be dangerously and outrageously jealous. Tears in your eyes still, my sweet? Let me kiss them away; poor eyes, surely they have wept enough in their time to permit of their only smiling in the future.'

When they have declared over and over again (in different languages every time, of course) the everlasting affection each feels for the other, Cecilia says:

'How late it grows, and you are in your evening dress, and without a hat. Have you dined?'

'Not yet; but I don't want any dinner.' (By this one remark, oh, reader! you may guess the depth and sincerity of his love.) 'We generally dine at half-past seven, but to-night we are to starve until eight to oblige Florence, who has been spending the day somewhere. So I dressed early and came down to see you.'

'At eight,' says Cecilia, alarmed; 'it is almost that now. You must go, or Lady Chetwoode will be angry with me, and I don't want anyone belonging to you to think bad thoughts of me.'

'There is plenty of time; it can't be nearly eight yet, why it is only half-an-hour since I came.'

'It is a quarter to eight,' says Cecilia, solemnly. 'Do go, and come again as early as you can to-morrow.'

'You will be glad to see me?'

'Yes, if you come very early.'

'And you are sure, my own darling, that you really love me?'

'Quite, *quite* sure,' tenderly.

'What a bore it is having to go home this lovely evening'—discontentedly. 'Certainly "Time was made for slaves." Well,'—with a sigh—'good-night, I suppose I must go. I shall run down directly after breakfast. Good-night, my own, my dearest.'

'Good-night, Cyril.'

'What a cold farewell; I shan't go away at all if you don't say something kinder.'

Standing on tiptoe, Cecilia lays her arms around his neck.

'Good-night my—darling,' she whispers tremulously; and with a last lingering caress they part as though years were about to roll by before they can meet again.

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CHAPTER XVII.

And, though she be but little, she is fierce.
Midsummer Night's Dream.

Bene. Suffer love! A good epithet! I do suffer love, indeed, for I love thee against my will.
Much Ado About Nothing.

IT is a glorious evening towards the close of September. The heat is intense, delicious, as productive of happy languor as though it was still the very heart of summer.

Outside upon the grass sits Lilian, idly threading daisies into chains, her riotous golden locks waving upon her fair forehead beneath the influence of the wind. At her feet, full

length, lies Archibald, a book containing selections from the works of favourite poets in his hand. He is reading aloud such passages as please him, and serve to illustrate the passion that day by day is growing deeper for his pretty cousin. Already his infatuation for her has become a fact so palpable, that not only has he ceased to deny it to himself, but everyone in the house is fully aware of it, from Lady Chetwoode down to the lowest housemaid. Sometimes, when the poem is an old favourite, he recites it, keeping his dark eyes fixed the while upon the fair coquettish face just above him.

Upon the balcony looking down upon them sits Florence, working at the everlasting parrot, with Guy beside her, utterly miserable, his whole attention concentrated upon his ward. For the past week he has been wretched as a man can be who sees a rival well-received

before his eyes day after day. Miss Beauchamp's soft speeches and tender glances, although many and pronounced, fail to console him, though to others he appears to accept them willingly enough, and to make a generous return, spending—how, he hardly knows, though perhaps *she* does—a good deal of time in her society. He must indeed be devoid of observation, if now he cannot pass a strict examination of the hues of that crewel bird (this is not a joke), for wherever he may be, there Miss Beauchamp is sure to show a few minutes later, always with her wools.

Noting all this, be sure Lilian draws from it her own conclusions.

As each clear silvery laugh reaches him from below Guy frowns, and winces at every fond poetical sentiment that, floated upwards by the wind, falls upon his ears.

'See the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister flower would be forgiven
If it disdained its brother:
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea,
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me?'

The words recited by Mr. Chesney with much *empressement* soar upwards and gain Guy's ear; Archibald is pointing his quotation with many impassioned glances and much tender emphasis; all of which is rather thrown away upon Lilian, who is not in the least sentimental.

'Read something livelier, Archie,' she says, regarding her growing chain with unlimited admiration. 'There is rather much honey about that.'

'If you can snub Shelley, I'm sure I don't know what it is you *do* like,' returns he, somewhat disgusted. A slight pause ensues, filled

up by the faint noise of the leaves of Chesney's volume as he turns them over impatiently.

'"Oh, my Luve's like a red, red, rose,"' he begins bravely, but Lilian instantly suppresses him.

'Don't,' she says. 'that's worse. I always think what a horrid "luve" she must have been. Fancy a girl with cheeks like that rose over there! Fancy writing a sonnet to a milkmaid! Go on, however; the other lines are rather pretty.'

'Oh my love's like a melody,
That's sweetly played in tune,'

reads Archie, and then stops.

'It is pretty,' he says agreeably; 'but if you had heard that last word persistently called "chune," I think it would have taken the edge off your fancy for it. I had an uncle who adored that little poem, but he *would* call the word "chune," and it rather spoiled the effect.

He's dead,' says Mr. Chesney, laying down his book, 'but I think I see him now.'

'In the pride of youth and beauty,
With a garland on his brow,'

quotes Lilian, mischievously.

'Well, not quite. Rather in an exceedingly rusty suit of evening clothes at the Opera. I took him there in a weak moment to hear the "late lamented Titiens" sing her choicest song in "Il Trovatore"—you know it?—well, when it was over and the whole house was in a perfect uproar of applause, I turned and asked him what he thought of it, and he instantly said he thought it was "a very pretty 'chune'!" Fancy Titiens singing a "chune"! I gave him up after that, and carefully avoided his society. Poor old chap, he didn't bear malice, however, as he died a year later and left me all his money.'

'More than you deserved,' says Lilian.

Here Cyril and Taffy appearing on the scene cause a diversion. They both simultaneously fling themselves upon the grass at Lilian's feet, and declare themselves completely used up.

'Let us have tea out here,' says Lilian, gaily, 'and enjoy our summer to its end.' Springing to her feet, she turns towards the balcony, careless of the fact that she has destroyed the lovely picture she made sitting on the green sward surrounded by her attendant swains.

'Florence, come down here, and let us have tea on the grass,' she calls out pleasantly to Miss Beauchamp.

'Do, Florence,' says Archibald, entreatingly; and:

'Miss Beauchamp you really *must*,' from Taffy, decides the point.

Florence, feeling it will look ungracious to

refuse, rises with reluctance, and sails down upon the *quartette* below, followed by Sir Guy.

'What an awful time we shall be having at Mrs. Boileau's this hour to-morrow night,' says Cyril, plaintively, after a long silence on his part. 'I shudder when I think of it. No one who has never spent an evening at the Grange can imagine the agony of it.'

'I vow I would rather be broken on the wheel than undergo it,' says Archibald. 'It was downright mean of Lady Chetwoode to let us all in for it. And yet no doubt things might have been worse; we ought to feel devoutly thankful old Boileau is well under the sod.'

'What was the matter with him?' asks Lilian.

'Don't name him,' says Cyril; 'he was past all human endurance; my blood runs cold when

I remember I once did know him. I rejoice to say he is no more. His name was Benjamin; and as he was small and thin, and she was large and fat, she (that is, Mrs. Boileau) was always called "Benjamin's portion." That's a joke, do you see it?'

'I do, so you don't take any bobs off *my* wages,' retorts Miss Chesney, promptly, with a distinct imitation of Kate Santley. 'And yet I cannot see how all this made the poor man odious.'

'No, not exactly that, though I don't think a well brought up man should let himself go to skin and bone. He was intolerable in other ways. One memorable Christmas-day Guy and I dined with him, and he got beastly drunk on the sauce for the plum-pudding. We were young at the time, and it made a lasting impression upon us. Indeed he was hardly the person to sit next at a prolonged

dinner-party, first because he was unmistakably dirty and——'

'Oh! Cyril!'

'Well, and why not? It is not impossible. Even Popes, it now appears, can be indifferent to the advantages to be derived from soap and water.'

'Really, Cyril, I think you might choose a pleasanter subject upon which to converse,' says Florence, with a disgusted curl of her short upper lip.

'I beg pardon all round, I'm sure,' returns Cyril meekly. 'But Lilian should be blamed, she *would* investigate the matter; and I am nothing, if not strictly truthful. He was a very dirty old man I assure you, my dear Florence.'

'Mrs. Boileau, however objectionable, seems to have been the best of the two; why did she marry him?' asks Lilian.

'Haven't the remotest idea, and even if I

had, I should be afraid to answer any more of your pertinent questions,' with an expressive nod in the direction of Florence. 'I can only say it was a very feeble proceeding on the part of such a capable person as Mrs. Boileau.'

'Just "another good woman gone wrong,"' suggests Taffy, mildly.

'Quite so,' says Archibald, 'though she adored him—she said. Yet he died, some said of fever, others of—Mrs. Boileau; no attention was ever paid to the others. When he *did* droop and die she planted all sorts of lovely little flowers over his grave, and watered them with her tears for ever so long. Could affection farther go?'

'Horrible woman!' says Miss Chesney; 'it only wanted that to finish my dislike to her; I hope when I am dead no one will plant flowers on *my* grave, the bare idea would make me turn in it.'

'Then we won't do it,' says Taffy, consolingly.

'I wish we had a few Indian customs in this country,' says Cyril, languidly. 'The Suttee was a capital institution. Think what a lot of objectionable widows we should have got rid of by this time; Mrs. Boileau for instance.

'And Mrs. Arlington,' puts in Florence, quietly. An unaccountable silence follows this speech. No one can exactly explain why, but everyone knows something awkward has been said. Cyril outwardly is perhaps the least concerned of them all; as he bites languidly a little blade of green grass, a faint smile flickers at the corners of his lips. Lilian is distinctly angry.

'Poor Mrs. Boileau; all this is rather ill-natured, is it not?' asks Florence, gently, rising as though a dislike to the gossip going on

around her compels her to return to the house. In reality it is a dislike to damp grass that urges her to flight.

'Shall I get you a chair, Florence?' asks Cyril somewhat irrelevantly as it seems.

'Pray don't leave us, Miss Beauchamp,' says Taffy. 'If you will stay on, we will swear not to make any more ill-natured remarks about anyone.'

'Then I expect silence will reign supreme, and that the remainder of our *conversazione* will be of the deadly-lively order,' says Archibald; and Cyril at this moment arriving with the offered chair, Miss Beauchamp is kindly pleased to remain.

As the evening declines the midges muster in great force. Cyril and Taffy being in the humour for smoking—and having cheroots—are comparatively speaking happy; the others grow more and more secretly irritated every

moment. Florence is making lady-like dabs at her forehead every two seconds with her cambric handkerchief, and is regretting keenly her folly in not retiring indoors long ago. Midges sting her and raise uninteresting little marks upon her face, thereby doing irremediable mischief for the time being. The very thought of such a catastrophe fills her with horror. Her fair, plump hands are getting spoiled by these bloodthirsty little miscreants; this she notices with dismay, but is ignorant of the fact that a far worse misfortune is happening higher up. A tasteless midge has taken a fancy to her nose and has inflicted on it a serious bite; it is swelling visibly, and a swelled nose is not becoming, especially when it is set as nearly as Nature will permit in the centre of a pale, high-bred, but expressionless face.

Ignorant I say of this crowning mishap, she goes on dabbing her brow gently, while

all the others lie around her dabbing likewise.

At last Lilian loses all patience.

'Oh! *hang* these midges!' she says, naturally certainly, but rather too forcibly for the times we live in. The petulance of the soft tone, the expression used, makes them all laugh; except Miss Beauchamp, who, true to her training, maintains a demeanour of frigid disapproval, which has the pleasing effect of rendering the swelled nose more ludicrous than it was before.

'Have I said anything very *bizarre?*' demands Lilian, opening her eyes wide at their laughter. 'Oh!'—recollecting—'did I say "hang them"? It is all Taffy's fault, he will use school-boy slang. Taffy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—don't you see how you have shocked Florence?'

'And no wonder,' says Archibald, gravely;

'you know we swore to her not to abuse anything for the remainder of this evening, not even these little winged torments,' viciously squeezing half-a-dozen to death as he speaks.

'How are we going to the Grange to-morrow evening?' asks Taffy, presently.

The others have broken up and separated; Cyril and Archibald, at a little distance, are apparently convulsed with laughter over some shady story just being related by the former.

'I suppose,' goes on Taffy, 'as Lady Chetwoode won't come, we shall take the open traps, and not mind the carriage, the evenings are so fine. Who is to drive who, is the question.'

'No; who is to drive poor little I is the question. Sir Guy will you?' asks Lilian plaintively, prompted by some curious impulse, seeing him silent, handsome, moody in the background. A moment later she could have

killed herself for putting the question to him.

'Guy always drives me,' says Florence, calmly; 'I never go with anyone else, except in the carriage with Aunt Anne. I am nervous, and should be miserable with anyone I could not quite trust. Careless driving terrifies me. But Guy is never careless,' turning upon Chetwoode a face she fondly hopes is full of feeling, but which unfortunately is suggestive of nothing but a midge's bite. The nose is still the principal feature in it.

Placed in this awkward dilemma, Guy can only curse his fate and be silent. How can he tell Florence he does not care for her society, how explain to Lilian his wild desire for hers? He bites his moustache, and with his eyes fixed gloomily upon the ground maintains a disgusted silence. Truly luck is dead against him.

'Oh—that indeed!' says Lilian; and, being

a thorough woman, of course makes no allowance for his unhappy position. Evidently, —according to her view of the case—from his silent acquiescence in Miss Beauchamp's plan, he likes it. No doubt it was all arranged between them early this morning; and she, to have so far forgotten herself as to ask him to drive her! Oh! it is intolerable.

'You are quite right,' she says sweetly to Florence, even producing a smile for the occasion, as women will when their hearts are sorest. 'There is nothing so depressing as nervousness when driving. Perhaps Archibald will take pity upon me. Archie!' calling out to him, 'come here. I want you to do me a great favour'—with an enchanting smile 'Would it be putting you out dreadfully if I asked you to drive me to Mrs. Boileau's tomorrow evening?'—another smile still more enchanting.

'You really mean it?' asks Archibald, delighted, his dark face lighting, while Guy, looking on helplessly, almost groans aloud. 'You know how glad I shall be; I had no idea when I got up this morning such luck was in store for me. *Dear* Mrs. Boileau! if she could only guess how eager I am to start for her *charming* Grange!'

He says this in a laughing tone, but Chetwoode fully understands that, like the famous well, it has truth at the bottom of it.

'It grows late, does it not?' Florence says, rising gracefully. 'I think we had better go indoors. We have left Aunt Anne too long alone.'

'Auntie is lying down. Her head is bad,' says Lilian; 'I was with her just before I came out, and she said she wished to be alone.'

'Yes—she can't bear noise,' remarks Florence, calmly but meaningly. 'I must go and

see how she is.' There is the faintest suspicion of an emphasis upon the personal pronoun.

'That will be very kind of you, dear,' says Miss Chesney, suavely. 'And Florence—would you like anything to rub to your poor nose? Cold cream—or glycerine—or that; Nurse has all those sort of things, I'm sure.' This is a small revenge of Lilian's, impossible to forego; while enjoying it, she puts on the tenderest air of sympathetic concern, and carefully regards Miss Beauchamp's nose with raised brows of solicitude.

'My nose?' repeats Florence, reddening.

'Yes, dear. One of those unkind little insects has bitten it shamefully, and now it is all pink and swollen. Didn't you know it? I have been feeling so sorry for you for the last ten minutes. It is too bad—is it not? I hardly think it will be well before dinner, and

it is so disfiguring.' All this she utters in tones of the deepest commiseration.

Florence wisely makes no reply. She would have borne the tortures of the rack rather than exhibit any vehement temper before Guy; so she contents herself with casting a withering glance upon Lilian—who receives it with the utmost *sang froid*—and, putting her handkerchief up to the wounded member, sweeps into the house full of righteous indignation.

Sir Guy, after a lengthened hesitation, evidently makes up his mind to do something, and with his face full of purpose, follows her. This devotion on his part is more than Lilian—in spite of her suspicions—has bargained for.

'Gone to console his "sleepy Venus" for the damage done to her "Phidian nose,"' she says to Taffy, with a rather bitter laugh.

'Little girls should neither quote Don Juan nor say illnatured things,' replies that youth with an air of lofty rebuke. But Lilian, not being in the mood for even Taffy's playfulness, makes no answer, and walks away to her beloved garden to seek consolation from the flowers.

Whatever Guy's conference with Florence was about, it was short and decisive, as in five minutes he again emerged from the house, and looking vainly round him, starts in search of Lilian. Presently, at the end of the long lawn, he sees her.

'Well, has her poor dear nose recovered all its pristine freshness?' she asks him in a rather reckless tone as he comes up to her.

'Lilian,' says Guy abruptly, eagerly, taking no notice of this sally—indeed scarcely hearing it—'it was all a mistake; I could not speak plainly a moment ago, but I have arranged it

all with Florence; and—will you let me drive you to Mrs. Boileau's to-morrow evening?'

'No, thank you,' a quick gleam in her large eyes that should have warned him; 'I would not make Florence unhappy for the world. Think of her nerves!'

'She will be quite as safe with Cyril—or—your cousin.'

'Which cousin?'

'Chesney.'

'I think not, because I am going with Archibald.'

'You can easily break off with him,' anxiously.

'But supposing I do not wish to break off with him?'

'Am I to think, then, you prefer going with your cousin?' in a freezing tone.

'Certainly; I prefer his society to yours, ten thousand times,' forcibly; 'it was mere

idleness made me say I wished to go with you. Had you agreed to my proposition I should probably have changed my mind afterwards, so everything is better as it is; I am glad now you did not answer me differently.'

'I did not answer you at all,' returns Guy, unwisely.

'No, you were *afraid*,' returns she with a mocking laugh that sends the red blood to his forehead.

'What do you mean?' he asks, angrily.

'Nothing. It was foolish my mentioning the subject. We are disputing about a mere trifle. I am going with Archie whatever happens, because I like him, and because I know he is always glad to be with me.'

She turns as though to leave him, and Guy impulsively catches her hand to detain her; as he does so his eyes fall upon the little white fingers imprisoned in his own, and there, upon

one of them—beside his own ring—he sees another—newer.

'Who gave you that?' he asks impulsively, knowing well the answer to his question.

'Archibald,' removing her hand quietly, but with determination.

A dead silence follows. Then, speaking calmly by a supreme effort, Guy says:

'I suppose so. Are you going to marry your cousin, Lilian?'

'Is it in the capacity of guardian you ask that question?' defiantly. 'You should remember I don't acknowledge one.'

'Must I understand by that you will accept him; or have accepted him?'

'Certainly not. You told me yesterday you found it impossible to understand me at any time; why seek to do what is beyond your power? However, I don't mind telling you, that as yet Archibald has not made me a formal

offer of his heart and hand. No doubt'—mockingly—'when he does me the honour to propose to me, he will speak to you on the subject.' Then she laughs a little. 'Don't you think it is rather absurd arranging matters for poor Archie without his consent? I assure you, he has as much idea of proposing to me as the man in the moon.'

'If you are not engaged to him you should not wear his ring,' severely.

'I am not engaged to you, and I wear your ring. If it is wrong to accept a ring from a man to whom one is not engaged, I think it was very reprehensible of you to give me this,' pointing to it.

'With me it is different,' Guy is beginning rather lamely, not being sure of his argument; but Miss Chesney, disdaining subterfuge, interrupts him.

'A thing is either right or wrong,' she says

superbly. 'I may surely wear either none, or both.'

'Then remove both,' says Guy, feeling he would rather see her without his, if it must only be worn in conjunction with Chesney's.

'I shan't,' returns Lilian, deliberately. 'I shall wear both as long as it suits me—because I adore rings.'

'Then you are acting very wrongly. I know there is little use in my speaking to you, once you are bent upon having your own way. You are so self-willed, and so determined.'

> 'Without a friend, what were humanity,
> To hunt our errors up with a good grace?'

quotes Lilian, lightly. 'There is no use in your lecturing me, Sir Guy; it does me little good. *You* want *your* way, and I want *mine*; I am not "self-willed," but I don't like tyranny, and I always said you were tyrannical.'

'You are of course privileged to say what you like,' haughtily.

'Very well; then I *shall* say it. One would think I was a baby the way you—scold—and torment me,' here the tears of vexation and childish wrath rise in her eyes; 'but I do not acknowledge your authority; I have told you so a hundred times, and I never shall—never, never, never!'

'Lilian, listen to me——'

'No, I will not. I wonder why you come near me at all. Go back to Florence; she is so calm, so sweet, so—*somnolent*'—with a sneer, 'that she will not ruffle your temper. As for me, I hate disagreeable people! Why do you speak to me? it does neither of us any good. It only makes you ill-mannered and me thoroughly unhappy.'

'Unhappy!'

'Yes,' petulantly, '*miserable*. Surely of

late you must have noticed how I avoid you. It is nothing but scold, scold, scold, all the time I am with you; and I confess I don't fancy it. You might have known, without my telling you, that I detest being with you!'

'I shall remember it for the future,' returns he in a low voice, falling back a step or two, and speaking coldly, although his heart is beating wildly with passionate pain and anger.

'Thank you,' retorts Lilian; 'that is the kindest thing you have said to me for many a day.'

Yet the moment his back is turned she regrets this rude speech, and all the many others she has given way to during the last fortnight. Her own incivility vexes her, wounds her to the heart's core, for however mischievously inclined, and quick-tempered she may be, she is marvellously warm-hearted and kindly, and fond.

For full five minutes she walks to and fro, tormented by secret upbraidings, and then a revulsion sets in. What does it matter after all, she thinks, with an impatient shrug of her pretty soft shoulders. A little plain speaking will do him no harm, in fact may do him untold good. He has been so petted and spoiled all his life long, that a snubbing, however small, will enliven him, and make him see himself in his true colours. (What his true colours may be she does not specify even to herself.) And if he is so devoted to Florence, why let him then spend his time with her, and not come lecturing other people on matters that don't concern him. Such a fuss about a simple emerald ring indeed! Could anything be more absurd?

Nevertheless she feels a keen desire for reconciliation; so much so that later on—just before dinner—seeing Sir Guy in the shrub-

beries, walking up and down in deepest meditation—evidently of the depressing order—she makes up her mind to go and speak to him. Yes, she has been in the wrong; she will go to him therefore, and make the *amende honorable*; and he (he is not altogether bad!) will doubtless be charmed to be friends with her again.

So thinking, she moves slowly though deliberately up to him, regarding the while with absolute fervour the exquisite though frail geranium blossom she carries in her hand. It is only partly opened, and is delicately tinted as her own skin.

When she is quite close to her guardian she raises her head, and instantly affects a deliciously surprised little manner at the fact of his unexpected (?) nearness.

'Ah, Sir Guy, you here?' she says, airily, with an apparent consummate forgetfulness of all past broils. 'You are just in time; see

what a lovely flower I have for you. Is not the colour perfect? Is it not sweet?' proffering to him the pale geranium.

'It is,' replies he, taking the flower mechanically because it is held out to him, but hardly looking at it. His face is pale with suppressed anger, his lips are closely set beneath his fair moustache; she is evidently not forgiven. 'And yet I think,' he says, slowly, 'if you knew my opinion of you, you would be the last to offer me a flower.'

'And what then is your opinion?' demands Lilian, growing whiter and whiter until all her pretty face has faded to the 'paleness o' the pearl.' Instinctively she recoils a little, as though some slight blow has touched and shaken her.

'I think you a heartless coquette,' returns he distinctly, in a low tone that literally rings with passion. 'Take back your gift. Why

should you waste it upon one who does not care to have it?' and flinging the flower contemptuously at her feet he turns and departs.

For a full minute Miss Chesney neither stirs nor speaks. When he is quite gone, she straightens herself, and draws her breath sharply.

'Well, I never,' she says between her little white teeth, which is a homely phrase borrowed from Nurse, but very expressive, and with that she plants a small foot viciously upon the unoffending flower, and crushes it out of all shape and recognition.

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Dinner is over, and almost forgotten; conversation flags. Even to the most wakeful it occurs that it must be bordering upon bed-hour.

Lilian, whose nightly habit it is to read for an hour or two in her bed before going to sleep,

remembering she has left her book where she took off her hat on coming into the house some hours ago, leaves the drawing-room, and having crossed the large hall, turns into the smaller one that leads to the library.

Midway in this passage one lamp is burning; the three others (because of some inscrutable reason known only to the under-footman) have not been lit; consequently to-night this hall is in semi-darkness.

Almost at the very end of it Miss Chesney finds herself face to face with her guardian, and, impelled by mischief and coquetry, stops short to confront him.

'Well, Sir Guy, have you got the better of your naughty temper?' she asks, saucily. 'Fie, to keep a little wicked black dog upon your shoulder for so long! I hope by this time you are properly ashamed of yourself, and that you are ready to promise me never to do it again.'

Guy is silent. He is thinking how lovely she is, how indifferent to him, how unattainable.

'Still unrepentant,' goes on Lilian with a mocking smile; 'you are a more hardened sinner than even I gave you credit for. And what is it all about pray? What has vexed you? Was it my cousin's ring? or my refusing to accompany you to-morrow to Mrs. Boileau's?'

'Both,' replies he, feeling compelled to answer. 'I still think you should not wear your cousin's ring unless engaged to him.'

'Nor yours either, of course,' with a frown. 'How you do love going over the same ground again and again. Well,' determinately, 'as I told you before, I shall wear both—do you hear?—just as long as I please. So now, my puissant guardian,' with a gesture that is almost a challenge, 'I defy you, and dare you to do your worst.'

Her tone, as is intended, irritates him; her beauty, her open though childish defiance maddens him. Gazing at her in the uncertain light, through which her golden hair and gleaming sapphire eyes shine clearly, he loses all self-control, and in another moment has her in his arms, and has kissed her once, twice passionately.

Then recollection, all too late, returns, and shocked, horrified at his own conduct, he releases her, and leaning against the wall with folded arms and lowered eyes, awaits his doom.

Standing where he has left her, pale as a little colourless ghost, with her lips as white as death, and her great eyes grown black through mingled terror and amazement, Lilian regards him silently. She does not move, she scarcely seems to breathe; no faintest sound of anger escapes her. Then slowly—slowly raising her handkerchief she draws it lightly across her

lips, and with a gesture full of contempt and loathing flings it far from her. After which she draws herself up to her extremest height, and with her head erect and her whole figure suggestive of insulted pride and dignity, she sweeps past him into the library, closing the door quietly behind her.

When the last sound of her footsteps has disappeared, Guy rouses himself as if from a hateful dream, and presses his hand to his forehead. Stooping, he picks up the disdained handkerchief, that lies mournfully in the corner, thrusts it into his bosom, and turning away towards his own quarters is seen no more that night.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

The best laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft a-gley,
And lea'e us nought but grief and pain,
For promised joy.—R. BURNS.

ALL next day Lilian treats him as though to her eyes he is invisible. She bestows upon him none of the usual courtesies of life; she takes no 'good morrow,' nor gives one. She is singularly deaf when he speaks—except when common etiquette compels her to return an answer to one or other of his speeches—she is dumb to him, or when thus compelled, makes an answer in her iciest tones.

At five o'clock they all start for the Grange —Mrs. Boileau being one of those unpleasant people who think they can never see enough of their guests—or that their guests can never see enough of them—I am not sure which; and who consequently has asked them to come early, to inspect her gardens and walk through her grounds before dinner.

As the grounds are well worth seeing, and the evening is charming for strolling, this is about the pleasantest part of the entertainment. At least so thinks Lilian, who (seeing Guy's evident depression) is in radiant spirits. So does Archibald, who follows her as her shadow. They are both delighted at everything about the Grange, and wander hither and thither, looking and admiring as they go.

And indeed it is a charming old place, older perhaps than Chetwoode, though smaller, and less imposing. The ivy has clambered up

over all its ancient walls, and towers, and battlements, until it presents to the eye a sheet of darkest richest green, through which the old-fashioned casements peep in picturesque disorder, hardly two windows being in a line.

Inside, steps are to be met with everywhere in the most unexpected places—curious doors leading one never knows where—ghostly corridors along which at dead of night armed knights of bygone days might tramp, their armour clanking—winding stairs—and tapestries that tell of warriors brave and maidens fair, long since buried and forgotten.

Outside, the gardens are lovely and rich in blossom. Here too the old world seems to have lingered, the very flowers themselves, though born yesterday, having all the grace and modesty of an age gone by.

Here

> The oxlips and the nodding violet grows:
> Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,
> With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.

Here too the 'nunlike lily' hangs its head, the sweet 'neglected wall-flower' blows, the gaudy sunflower glitters, and the 'pale jessamine, the white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,' display their charms; while amongst them, towering over all through the might of its majesty, shines the rose—'Joy's own flower,' as Felicia Hemans sweetly calls it.

Now—being late in the season—the blossom is more scarce, though still the air is heavy with delicate perfume, and the eyes grow drunk with gazing on the beauty of the autumn flowers. Through them goes Lilian, with Archibald gladly following.

All day long he has had her to himself, and she has been so good to him, so evidently pleased and contented with his society alone, that within his breast an earnest hope has risen, so strongly, that he only waits a fitting opportunity to lay his heart and fortune at her feet.

'I can walk no more,' says Lilian at last, sinking upon the grass beneath the shade of a huge beech that spreads its kindly arms above her. 'Let us sit here and talk.'

Archibald throws himself beside her, and for a few minutes silence reigns supreme.

'Well?' says Lilian at length, turning lazy though inquisitive eyes upon her companion.

'Well?' says Archibald in return.

'I said you were to talk,' remarks Lilian in an aggrieved tone. 'And you have not said one word yet. You ought to know by this time how I dislike silence.'

'Blame yourself; I have been racking my brains without success for the last two minutes to try to find something suitable to say. Did you never notice how when one person says to another "Come let us talk," how that other is suddenly stricken with hopeless stupidity? So

it is now with me; I cannot talk, I am greatly afraid.'

'Well, I can,' says Lilian, 'and as I insist on your doing so also, I shall ask you questions that require an answer. First, then, did you ever receive a note from me on my leaving the Park, asking you to take care of my birds?'

'Yes.'

'And you fed them?'

'Regularly,' says Archibald, telling a fearful lie deliberately, as from the day he read that note to this he has never once remembered the feathered friends she mentions, and even now as he speaks has only the very haziest idea of what she means.

'I am glad of that,' regarding him searchingly. 'It would make me unhappy to think they had been neglected.'

'Don't be unhappy, then,' returning her gaze calmly and unflinchingly; 'they are all

right, I took care of that.' His manner is truthful in the extreme, his eyes meet hers reassuringly. It is many years since Mr. Chesney first learned the advantage to be derived from an impassive countenance. And now with Lilian's keen blue eyes looking him through and through, he feels doubly thankful that practice has made him so perfect in the art of suppressing his real thoughts. He has also learned the wisdom of the old maxim,

> When you tell a lie tell a good one,
> When you tell a good one stick to it.

and sticks to his accordingly.

'I am so pleased!' says Lilian, after a slight pause, during which she tells herself young men are not so wretchedly thoughtless after all, and that Archibald is quite an example to his sex in the matter of good-nature. 'One of my chiefest regrets on leaving home was thinking how my birds would miss me.'

'I am sorry you ever left it.'

'So am I, of course. I was very near declining to do so at the last moment. It took Aunt Priscilla a full week to convince me of the error of my ways, and prove to me that I could not live alone with a gay and (as she hinted) wicked bachelor.'

'I have never been so unfortunate as to meet her,' says Archibald, mildly, 'but I would bet any money your Aunt Priscilla is a highly objectionable and interfering old maid.'

'No, she is not; she is a very good woman, and quite an old dear in some ways.'

'She is an old maid?' raising himself on his elbow with some show of interest.

'Well, yes, she is; but I like old maids,' says Lilian, stoutly.

'Oh, she *likes* old maids,' says Mr. Chesney *sotto voce*, sinking back once more into his lounging position. He evidently considers

there is nothing more to be said on that head.

'And so she wouldn't let you stay?'

'No. You should have seen her face when I suggested writing to you to ask if I might have a suite of rooms for my own use, promising faithfully never to interfere with you in any way. It was a picture!'

'It pained you very much to leave the Park?'

'It was death to me. Remember it had been my home all my life; every stick and stone about the place was dear to me.'

'It was downright brutal my turning you out,' says Archibald, warmly; 'I could hate myself when I think of it. But I knew nothing of it, and—I had not seen you then.'

'If you had, would you have let me stay on?'

'I think so,' returns he, softly, gazing with dangerous tenderness at the delicate rose-tinted face above him. Then, 'Even so, I wish you had

asked me; I so seldom go near the place, you would have been thoroughly welcome to stay on in it, had you been the ugliest person breathing.'

'So I said at the time, but Aunt Priscilla would not hear of it. I am sure I heard enough about the proprieties at that time to last me all my life. When all arguments failed,' says Miss Chesney, breaking into a gay laugh, as recollection crowds upon her, 'I proposed one last expedient that nearly drove Auntie wild with horror. What do you think it was?'

'Tell me.'

'I said I would ask your hand in marriage, and so put an end to all slanderous tongues—that is, if you consented to have me. See what a narrow escape you had,' says Lilian, her merriment increasing; 'it would have been so awkward to refuse!'

Archibald gazes at her earnestly. He has been through the hands of a good many

women in his time, but now confesses himself fairly puzzled. Is her laughter genuine? is it coquetry? or simple amusement?

'Had you ever a proposal, Lilian?' asks he quietly, his eyes still riveted upon her face.

'No,' surprised; 'what an odd question! I suppose it *is* humiliating to think that up to this no man has thought me worth loving. I often imagine it all,' says Lilian, confidentially, taking her knees into her embrace, and letting her eyes wander dreamily over to the hills far away behind the swaying trees. 'And I dare-say some day my curiosity will be gratified. But I do hope he won't write—I should like to *see* him do it; I wouldn't,' says Miss Chesney, solemnly, 'give a pin for a man who wouldn't go down on his knees to his lady-love.'

This last remark under the circumstances is eminently unwise. A moment later Lilian is made aware of it by the fact of Archibald's

rising, and going down deliberately on his knees before her.

'It can scarcely be news to you to tell you I love you,' says he, eagerly. 'Lilian, will you marry me?'

'What are you saying?' says Miss Chesney, half frightened, half amused; 'you must be going mad! Do get up, Archie; you cannot think how ridiculous you look.'

'Tell me you will marry me,' entreats that young man, unmoved even by the fact of his appearing grotesque in the eyes of his beloved.

'No; I will not,' shaking her head. 'Archie, do move; there is the most dreadful spider creeping up your leg.'

'I don't care, let him creep,' says Archibald, valiantly; 'I shan't stir until you give me a kind answer.'

'I don't know what to say; and besides I can do nothing but laugh while you maintain

your present position. Get up instantly, you foolish boy, you are ruining the knees of your best trousers.'

Whether this thought carries weight with Mr. Chesney I know not, but certainly he rises to his feet without further demur.

'You spoke about the Park a few minutes ago,' he says, slowly; 'you know now you can have it back again if you will.'

'But not in that way. Did you think I was hinting?' growing rather red. 'No; please don't say another word. I wonder you can be so silly.'

'Silly!' somewhat aggrieved; 'I don't know what you mean by that; surely a fellow may ask a woman to marry him without being termed "silly." I ask you again now. Lilian, will you marry me?'

'No, no, no, certainly not. I have no intention of marrying anyone for years to

come—if ever. I think,' with a charming pout, 'it is very unkind of you to say such things to me—and just when we were such good friends too; spoiling everything. I shall never be comfortable in your society again; I'm sure I never should have suspected you of such a thing. If I had——' A pause.

'You would not have come here with me to-day, you mean?' gloomily.

'Indeed I should not. Nothing would have induced me. You have put me out terribly.'

'I suppose you like Chetwoode,' says Archibald still more gloomily. Having never been denied anything since his birth, he cannot bring himself to accept this crowning misfortune with becoming grace.

'I like everybody—except Florence,' returns Lilian, composedly.

Then there is another pause, rather longer than the first, and then—after a violent strug-

gle with her better feelings—Miss Chesney gives way, and laughs long and heartily.

'My dear Archibald, don't look so woe-begone,' she says. 'If you could only see yourself! You look as though every relation you ever had was dead. Why, you ought to be very much obliged to me. Have you never heard Mr. Punch's advice to young men about to marry?'

'I don't want anyone's advice; it is late for that, I fancy; Lilian—darling—*darling*—won't you——'

'I won't, indeed,' recoiling and waving him back, while feeling for the first time slightly embarrassed; 'don't come a step nearer—nobody ever made love to me before, and I perfectly *hate* it! I hope sincerely no one will ever propose to me again.'

'*I* shall!' doggedly; 'I shan't give you up yet. You have not thought about it. When

you know me better you may change your mind.'

'Do not deceive yourself,' gently, 'and do not be offended. It is not you I have an objection to, it is marriage generally. I have only begun my life, and a husband must be such a bore. Any number of people have told me so.'

'Old maids, such as your Aunt Priscilla, I daresay,' says Archibald, scornfully. 'Don't believe them. *I* wouldn't bore you, you should have everything exactly your own way.'

'I have that now.'

'And I will wait for you as long as you please.'

'So you may,' gaily; 'but mind, I don't desire you.'

'May I take that as a grain of hope?' demands he, eagerly grasping this poor shadow of a crumb with avidity, only to find later on

it is no crumb at all. 'Don't be cruel, Lilian, everyone thinks differently after a while; you may also. You have said I am not hateful to you; if then you would only promise to think it over——'

'Impossible,' airily: 'I never think: it is too fatiguing. So are you, by the by, just now. I shan't stay with you any longer lest I should be infected. Good-bye, Archie; when you are in a pleasanter mood you can return to me, but until then adieu.'

So saying she catches her train in one hand and runs away from him fast as her fleet little feet can carry her.

Down the pathway, round under the limes, into another path runs she, where suddenly she finds herself in Taffy's presence.

'Whither away, fair maid?' asks that youth, removing the cigar from his lips that he is enjoying all alone.

'I am running away from Archie. He was so excessively dull and disagreeable that I could not bring myself to waste another moment on him, so I ran away and left him just *planté là*,' says Miss Chesney with a little foreign gesture and a delicious laugh that rings far through the clear air, and reaches Archibald's ears as he draws nearer.

'Come, I hear footsteps,' whispers she, slipping her hand into Taffy's. 'Help me to hide from him.'

So together they scamper still farther away, until at last they arrive breathless but secure in the shrubberies that surround one side of the house.

When they have quite recovered themselves it occurs to Taffy that he would like to know all about it.

'What was he saying to you?' asks he, *à propos* of Chesney.

'Nothing,' promptly.

Taffy, curiously: 'Well, certainly that *was* very disagreeable.'

Lilian, demurely: 'It was.'

At this Taffy lays his hands upon her shoulders and gives her a good shake.

'Tell me directly,' says he, 'what he was saying to you.'

'How can I?' innocently; 'he says so much and none of it worth repeating.'

'Was he making love to you?'

'No. Oh, no,' mildly.

'I'm certain he was,' with conviction. 'And look here, Lil, don't you have anything to do with him, he isn't up to the mark by any means. He is too dark, and there is something queer about his eyes. I once saw a man who had cut the throats of his mother, his grandmother, and all his nearest relations—any amount of them—and his eyes were just like

Chesney's. Don't marry him whatever you do.'

'I won't,' laughing; 'I should hate to have my throat cut.'

'There's Chetwoode now,' says Taffy, who begins to think himself a very deep and delicate diplomatist. 'He is a very decent fellow all round if you like.'

'I do like certainly. It is quite a comfort to know Sir Guy is not indecent.'

'Oh, you know what I mean well enough. There's nothing underhand about Chetwoode. By the by, what have you been doing to him, he is awfully down on his luck all day?'

'I!' coldly. 'What should I do to Sir Guy?'

'I don't know, I'm sure, but girls have a horrid way of teazing a fellow while pretending to be perfectly civil to him all the time. It is my private opinion,' says Mr. Musgrave mys-

teriously—'and I flatter myself I am seldom wrong—that he is dead spoons on you.'

'Really, Taffy!' begins Lilian, angrily.

'Yes, he is; you take my word for it. I'm rather a judge in such matters. Bet you a fiver,' says Mr. Musgrave, 'he proposes to you before the year is out.'

'I wonder, Taffy, how you can be so vulgar,' says Lilian with crimson cheeks, and a fine show of superior breeding. 'I never bet. I forbid you to speak to me on this subject again. Sir Guy, I assure you, has as much intention of proposing to me, as I have of accepting him, should he do so.'

'More fool you,' says Taffy, unabashed. 'I'm sure he is much nicer than that melancholy Chesney. If I were a girl I should marry him straight off.'

'Perhaps he would not marry you,' replies Lilian, cuttingly.

'Wouldn't he? he would like a shot, if I were like Lilian Chesney,' says Taffy, positively.

'"Like a shot"—what does that mean?' says Miss Chesney, with withering sarcasm. 'It is a pity you cannot forget your schoolboy slang, and try to be a gentleman. I don't think you ever hear that "decent fellow" Sir Guy, or even that cut-throat Archibald, use it.'

With this parting shaft she marches off overflowing with indignation, leaving Mr. Musgrave lost in wonder at her sudden change of manner.

'What on earth is up with her now?' he asks himself desperately; but the dressing-bell ringing at this moment disarms thought, and sends him indoors to prepare for dinner.

Mrs. Boileau has asked no one to meet them except a lank and dreary curate, who is evidently a prime favourite with her. He is

an Honourable Mr. Boer, with nothing attractive about him except a most alarming voice that makes one glance instinctively at his boots under the mistaken impression that the sound must come from them. This is rather unfortunate for the curate, as his feet are not (or rather *are*) his strong point, Nature having endowed them with such a tremendous amount of heel, and so much sole, innocent of instep, as makes them unpleasantly suggestive of sledge hammers.

He is painfully talkative, and oppressively evangelical, which renders him specially abhorrent to Lilian, who has rather a fancy for flowers and candles, and nice little boys in white shirts. He is also undecided whether it is Miss Beauchamp or Miss Chesney he most admires. They have equal fortunes, and are therefore (in his clerical eyes) equally lovely. There is certainly more of Miss Beauchamp, but then there is a vivacity, a—ahem—'go,' if one might

say so, about Miss Chesney perfectly irresistible. Had one of these rival beauties been an heiress, and the other rich only in love's charms, I think I know which one Mr. Boer would have bowed before—not that I even hint at mercenary motives in his reverence, but as it is he is much exercised in his mind as to which he shall honour with his attentions.

I think Lilian wins the day, because after dinner he bears down upon her determinately, and makes for the fauteuil in which she lies ensconced looking bored and *ennuyée* to the last degree. Dinner has been insipid, the whole evening a mistake; neither Guy nor Archibald will come near her, or even look at her; and now Mr. Boer's meditated attack is the last straw that breaks the camel's back.

'I consider the school board very much to blame,' begins that divine while yet some yards distant, speaking in his usual blatant tones, that

never change their keynote, however long they may continue to insult the air.

'So do I,' says Lilian very gently and sweetly, but with such unmistakable haste as suggests a determination on her part to bring the undiscussed subject to an ignominious close. 'I quite agree with you; I think them terribly to blame. But I beg your pardon for one moment, I want to ask Mr. Chetwoode a question that has been haunting me for hours.'

Rising, she glides away from him over the carpet, leaving Mr. Boer—who takes a long time to understand anything, and could not possibly believe in a rebuff offered to himself in person—watching the tail of her long sweeping gown, and wondering curiously if all the little white frillings beneath it may not have something to do with a falling petticoat. At this point he pulls himself together with a start, and fears secretly he is growing immodest.

In the meantime Lilian has reached Cyril, who is sitting at a table somewhat apart, gazing moodily at a book containing prints of the chief villages in Wales. He, like herself, is evidently in the last stage of dejection.

Bending over him she whispers in an awful tone, but with a beaming smile meant to mystify the observant Boer:

'If you don't instantly deliver me from that man I shall make a point of going off into such a death-like swoon as will necessitate my being borne from the room. He is now going to tell me about that miserable school board all over again, and I can't, and won't stand it.'

'Poor child,' says Cyril with deepest sympathy; 'I will protect you. If he comes a step nearer, I swear to you I will have his blood.' Uttering this comforting assurance in the mildest tone, he draws a chair to the table, and together they explore Wales in print.

Then there is a little music, and a good deal of carefully suppressed yawning, and then the carriages are announced and they all bid their hostess good night, and tell a few pretty lies about the charming evening they have spent, &c.

'Cyril, will you drive me home?' Lilian says to him hurriedly in the hall, while they are being finally cloaked and shawled. As she says it she takes care to avoid his eyes, so she does not see the look of amused scrutiny that lies in them.

'So soon!' he says, tragically. 'It was an easy victory! I shall be only too charmed, my dear Lilian, to drive you to the other end of the world if need be.'

So they start and drive home together placidly, through the cool, soft night. Lilian is strangely silent; so is Cyril—the calm beauty

of the heavens above them rendering their lips mute.

> Now glowed the firmament
> With living sapphires; Hesperus that led
> The starry host, rode brightest; till the moon,
> Rising in clouded majesty, at length—
> Apparent queen!—unveiled her peerless light,
> And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

The night is very calm, and rich in stars; brilliant almost as garish day, but bright with that tender, unchanging, ethereal light—clear, yet full of peaceful shadow—that day can never know.

> There is no dew on the dry grass to-night,
> Nor damp within the shadow of the trees;
> The wind is intermitting, dry and light.

Lilian sighs gently as they move rapidly through the still air—a sigh not altogether born of the night's sweetness, but rather tinged with melancholy. The day has been a failure, and though through all its windings she has

been possessed by the spirit of gaiety, now in the subdued silence of the night, the reaction setting in, reduces her to the very verge of tears.

Cyril too is very quiet, but *his* thoughts are filled with joy. Lifting his gaze to the eternal vault above him, he seems to see in the gentle stars the eyes of his beloved smiling back at him. A dreamy happiness, an exquisite feeling of thankfulness, absorbs him, making him selfishly blind to the sadness of his little companion.

'How silent you are,' Lilian says at length, unable to endure her tormenting reverie any longer.

'Am I?'—smiling. 'I was thinking of some lines I read yesterday: the night is so lovely it recalls them. Of course they are as well known to you as to me; but hear them:

How beautiful is the night!
A dewy freshness fills the silent air;
No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,
Breaks the serene of heaven:
In full-orb'd glory yonder moon divine
Rolls through the dark blue depths.'

'Yes, they are pretty lines; they are Southey's I think,' says Lilian, and then she sighs again, and hardly another word is spoken between them until they reach home.

As they pull up at the hall-door, Guy, who has arrived a little before them, comes forward, and placing one foot upon the step of Cyril's T-cart, takes Lilian in his arms and lifts her to the ground. She is so astonished at the suddenness of this demonstration on his part that she forgets to make any protest, only—she turns slowly and meaningly away from him, with lowered eyes, and with averted head.

With a beseeching gesture he detains her, and gains for a moment her attention. He is

looking pale, miserable; there is an expression of deep entreaty in his usually steady blue eyes.

'Lilian, forgive me,' he whispers anxiously, trying to read her face by the moonlight; 'I have been sufficiently punished. If you could guess all I have endured to-day through your coldness, your scorn, you would say so too. Forgive me.'

'Impossible,' returns she, haughtily, in clear tones; and motioning him contemptuously to one side, follows Cyril into the house.

Inside they find Lady Chetwoode not only up and waiting for them, but wide awake. This latter is a compliment so thoroughly unexpected as to rouse within them feelings of the warmest gratitude.

'What, Madre—you still here?' says Cyril; 'why we imagined you not only out of your first, but far into your second beauty sleep by this time.'

'I missed you all so much I decided upon waiting up for you,' Lady Chetwoode answers, smiling benignly upon them all; 'besides, early in the evening—just after you left—I had a telegram from dear Mabel, saying she and Tom will surely be here to dinner to-morrow night. And the idea so pleased me I thought I would stay here to impart my news and hear yours.'

Everyone in the room who knows Mrs. Steyne, here declares his delight at the prospect of so soon seeing her again.

'She must have made up her mind at the very last moment,' says Guy. 'Last week she was undecided whether she should come at all. She hates leaving London.'

'She must be at Steynemore now,' remarks Cyril.

'Lilian, my dear child, how pale you are,' Lady Chetwoode says anxiously, taking Lilian's

hand and rubbing her cheeks gently with loving fingers. 'Cold too! The drive has been too much for you, and you are always so careless about wraps. I ordered supper in the library an hour ago. Come and have a glass of wine before going to bed.'

'No, thank you, Auntie—I don't care for anything.'

'Thank you, Aunt Anne, I think I will take something,' interposes Florence, amiably; 'the drive was long. A glass of sherry and one little biscuit will, I feel sure, do me good.'

Miss Beauchamp's 'one little biscuit,' as is well known, generally ends in a substantial supper.

'Come to the library then,' says Lady Chetwoode, and still holding Lilian's hand draws it within her arm, and in her own stately old-world fashion leads her there.

When they have dismissed the butler, and declared their ability to help each other, Lady Chetwoode says pleasantly:

'Now tell me everything. Had you an agreeable evening?'

'Too agreeable!' answers Cyril with suspicious readiness; 'I fear it will make all other entertainments sink into insignificance. I consider a night at Mrs. Boileau's the very wildest dissipation. We all sat round the room on uneasy chairs and admired each other; it would perhaps have been (if *possible*) a more successful amusement had we not been doing the same thing for the past two months—some of us for years! But it was tremendously exciting all the same.'

'Was there no one to meet you?'

'My dear mother, how could you suspect Mrs. Boileau of such a thing!'

'Yes—there was a Mr. Boer,' says Florence,

looking up blandly from her chicken, 'a man of very good family—a clergyman——'

'No—a curate,' interrupts Cyril mildly.

'He made himself very agreeable,' goes on Florence in her soft monotone, that nothing disturbs. 'He was so conversational, and so well-read. You liked him, Lilian?'

'Who? Mr. Boer? No, I thought him insufferable—so dull—so prosy,' says Lilian, wearily. She has hardly heard Miss Beauchamp's foregoing remarks.

'His manner, certainly, is neither frivolous, nor extravagant,' Florence returns somewhat sharply, 'but he appeared sensible and earnest, rare qualities now-a-days.'

'Did I hear you say he wasn't extravagant,' breaks in Cyril lazily, purposely misconstruing her application of the word. 'My dear Florence, consider! Could anything show such reckless extravagance as the length

of his coat-tails; I never saw so much superfluous cloth in any man's garment before. It may be saintly, but it was cruel waste!'

'How did you amuse yourselves?' asks Lady Chetwoode, hastily, forestalling a threatening argument.

'As best we might. Lilian and I amused each other, and I think we had the best of it. If our visit to the Grange did no other good, it at least awoke in me a thorough sense of loyalty; I cannot tell you,' with a glance at Lilian, 'how often I blessed the "Prints of Wales" this night.'

'Oh! Cyril, what a miserable joke,' says Lilian smiling, but there is little warmth in her smile, and little real merriment in her usually gay tones. All this, Cyril—who is sincerely fond of her—notes with regret and concern.

'Guy, give Lilian a glass of Moselle,' says his mother at this moment; 'it is what she

prefers, and it will put a little colour into her cheeks, she looks so fatigued.' As she says this she moves across the room to speak to Florence, leaving Lilian standing alone upon the hearth-rug. Guy, as desired, brings the wine and hands it to Lilian.

'No, thank you,' turning from him coldly. 'I do not wish for it.'

'Nevertheless take it,' Guy entreats, in a low voice; 'you are terribly white, and,' touching her hand gently, 'as cold as death. Is it because *I* bring it you will not have it? Will you take it from Taffy?'

A choking sensation rises in Miss Chesney's throat; the unbidden tears spring to her eyes, it is by a passionate effort alone she restrains them from running down her cheeks. As I have said before, the day has been a distinct failure. She will not speak to Guy—Archibald will not speak to her. A sense of isolation is

oppressing and weighing her down. She, the pet, the darling, is left lonely, while all the others round her laugh and jest, and accept the good the gods provide. Like a spoiled child she longs to rush to her nurse's arms, and have a good cry within the shelter of that fond woman's arms.

Afraid to speak, lest her voice betray her; afraid to raise her eyes, lest the tell-tale tears within them be seen; she silently—though against her will—takes the glass Sir Guy offers, and puts it to her lips, whereupon he is conscious of a feeling of thankfulness—the bare fact of her accepting anything at his hands seeming to breathe upon him forgiveness.

Lilian having finished her Moselle, returns him the glass silently. Having carried it to the table, he once more glances instinctively to

where he has left her standing. But she has disappeared. Without a word to anyone she has slipped from the library and sought refuge in her own room.

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CHAPTER XIX.

This much, however, I may add: her years
Were ripe, they might make six and twenty springs;
But there are forms which Time to touch forbears,
And turns aside his scythe to vulgar things.
Don Juan.

NEXT day creates but little change in Lilian's demeanour. So far as Guy is concerned her manner is still frozen and unrelenting. She shows no sign of a desire to pardon, and Chetwoode noting this grows hardened, and out-Herods Herod in his imitation of her coldness.

Archibald, on the contrary, gives in almost directly. Finding it impossible to maintain his

injured bearing beyond luncheon, he succumbs, and throwing himself upon her mercy, is graciously received and once more basks in the full smiles of beauty. At heart Lilian is glad to welcome him back, and is genial and sweet to him as though no ugly *contretemps* had occurred between them yesterday.

Mabel Steyne being expected in the evening, Lady Chetwoode is especially happy, and takes no heed of minor matters, or else her eldest son's distraction would surely have claimed her attention. But Mabel's coming is an event, and a happy one, and at half-past seven, pleased and complacent, Lady Chetwoode is seated in her drawing-room, awaiting her arrival. Lilian and Florence are with her, and one or two of the others, Guy amongst them. Indeed Mrs. Steyne's coming is a gratification the more charming that it is a rarity, as she seldom visits the country, being strongly

addicted to City pursuits and holding country life and ruralism generally, in abhorrence.

Just before dinner she arrives; there is a little flutter in the hall, a few words, a few steps, and then the door is thrown open and a young woman, tall, with dark eyes and hair, a nose slightly celestial, and a very handsome figure, enters. She walks swiftly up the room with the grand and upright carriage that belongs to her, and is followed by a tall, fair man indolent though good to look at, with a straw-coloured moustache, and as much whisker as one might swear by.

'Dear Auntie, I have come!' says Mrs. Steyne, joyfully, which is a fact so obvious as to make the telling of it superfluous.

'Mabel, my dear, how glad I am to see you!' exclaims Lady Chetwoode, rising and holding out her arms to her. A pretty pink flush comes to life in the old woman's cheeks,

making her appear ten years younger, and adding a thousand charms to her sweet old face.

They kiss each other warmly, the younger woman with tender *empressement.*

'It is kind of you to say so,' she says fondly. 'And you, Auntie, why, bless me, how young you look! it is disgraceful. Presently I shall be the Auntie, and you the young and lovely Lady Chetwoode. Darling Auntie, I am delighted to be with you again!'

'How do you do, Tom?' Lady Chetwoode says, putting her a little to one side to welcome her husband, but still holding her hand. 'I do hope you two have come to stay a long time in the country.'

'Yes, until after Christmas, so you will have time to grow heartily sick of us,' says Mrs. Steyne. 'Ah, Florence.'

She and Florence press cheeks sympathetic-

ally, as though no evil passages belonging to the past have ever occurred between them. And then Lady Chetwoode introduces Lilian.

'This is Lilian,' she says, drawing her forward. 'I have often written to you about her.'

'My supplanter,' remarks Mabel Steyne, turning with a smile that lights up all her handsome brunette face. As she looks at Lilian fair, and soft, and pretty, the rather *insouciant* expression that has grown upon her own during her encounter with Florence fades, and once more she becomes her own gay self. 'I hope you will prove a better companion to Auntie than I was,' she says with a merry laugh, taking and pressing Lilian's hand. Lilian instinctively returns the pressure and the laugh. There is something wonderfully fetching in Mrs. Steyne's dark, brilliant eyes.

'She is the best of children!' Lady Chet-

woode says, patting Lilian's shoulder; 'though indeed, my dear Mabel, I saw no fault in you.'

'Of course not. Have you noticed, Miss Chesney, Lady Chetwoode's greatest failing? It is that she will not see a fault in anyone.'

'She never mentioned your faults, at all events,' Lilian answers, smiling.

'I hope your baby is quite well?' Florence asks calmly, who is far too well bred ever to forget her manners.

'The darling child—yes—I hope she is well,' Lady Chetwoode says, hastily, feeling as though she has been guilty of unkindness in not asking for the baby before. Miss Beauchamp possesses to perfection that most unhappy knack of placing people in the wrong position.

'Quite, thank you,' answering Lady Chetwoode instead of Florence, while a little fond

glance that is usually reserved for the nursery, creeps into her expressive eyes. 'If you admired her before, you will quite love her now. She has grown so big, and fat, and has such dear little sunny curls all over her head!'

'I like fair babies,' says Lilian.

'Because you are a fair baby yourself,' says Cyril.

'She can say Mammy and Pappy quite distinctly, and I have taught her to say Auntie very sweetly,' goes on Mrs. Steyne rapt in recollection of her offspring's genius. 'She can say "cake" too, and—and that is all I think.'

'You forget, Mabel, don't you?' asks her husband, languidly. 'You underrate the child's abilities. The other day when she was in a frenzy because I would not allow her to pull out my moustache in handfuls she said——'

'She was never in a frenzy, Tom,' indig-

nantly; 'I wonder how you can say so of the dear angel.'

'Was she not—if *you* say so of course I was mistaken, but at the time I firmly believed it was temper. At all events, Lady Chetwoode, on that momentous occasion, she said "Nanna warragood," without a mistake. She is a wonderful child!'

'Don't pay any attention to him, Auntie,' with a contemptuous shrug. 'He is himself quite idiotic about baby, so much so that he is ashamed of his infatuation. I shall bring her here some day to let you see her.'

'You must name the day. Would next Monday suit you?'

'You needn't press the point,' Tom Steyne says, warningly; 'but for me, the child and its nurse would be in the room at this moment. Mab and I had a stand-up fight about it in the hall just before starting, and it was only after a

good deal of calm though firm expostulation I carried the day. I represented to her that as a rule babies are not invited out to dine at eight o'clock at night, and that children of her age are generally more attractive to their mothers than to anyone else.'

'Barbarian!' says Lady Chetwoode.

'How have you been getting on in London, Mab?' asks Cyril. 'Made any new conquests?'

'Several,' replies Tom, 'though I think on the whole she is going off. She did not make up her usual number this season. She has, however, on her list two nice boys in the F.O. and an infant in the Guards. She is rather unhappy about them, as she cannot make up her mind which it is she likes best.'

'Wrong, Tom. Yesterday I made it up. I like the "infant" best. But what really saddens me is, that I am by no means sure he

likes *me* best. He is terribly fond of Tom, and I sometimes fear thinks him the better fellow of the two.'

At this moment the door opens and Taffy comes in.

'Why! Here is my "infant,"' exclaims Mabel, surprised. 'Dear Mr. Musgrave, I had no idea I should meet you here.'

'My dear Mrs. Steyne! I had no idea such luck was in store for me. I am so glad to see you again! Lilian—why didn't you break it to me? Joyful surprises are sometimes dangerous.'

'I thought you knew. We have been discussing "Mabel's" coming,' with a shy smile, 'all the past month.'

'But how could I possibly guess that the "Mabel" who was occupying everybody's thoughts could be my Mrs. Steyne?'

'Ours!' murmurs Tom faintly.

'Yes, mine,' says Taffy, who is not troubled with over much shyness.

'Mr. Musgrave is your cousin?' Mabel asks, turning to Lilian.

'No, I am her son,' says Taffy; 'you wouldn't think it—would you. She is a good deal older than she looks, but she gets herself up wonderfully. She is not a bad mother,' reflectively, 'when one comes to think of it.'

'I daresay if you spoke the truth you would confess her your guardian angel,' says Mabel, letting a kindly glance fall on pretty Lilian. 'She takes care of you, no doubt.'

'And such care,' answers Lilian; 'but for me I do believe Taffy would have gone to the bad long ago.'

'"Taffy!" what a curious name. So quaint—and pretty too, I think. May I?' with a quick irrepressible glance, that is half fun, half natural coquetry, 'call you Taffy?'

'You may call me anything you like,' returns that young gentleman with the utmost *bonhomie*.

> 'Call me Daphne, call me Chloris,
> Call me Lalage, or Doris,
> Only—*only*—call me thine!'

'It is really mortifying that I can't,' says Mrs. Steyne, while she and the others all laugh.

'Sir,' says Tom Steyne, 'I would have you remember the lady you are addressing is my wife.'

Says Taffy reproachfully:

'Do you think I don't remember it—to my sorrow?'

They have got down to dinner and as far as the fish by this time, so are all feeling friendly and good-natured.

'Tell you what you'll do, Mab,' says Guy. 'You shall come over here next week to stay

with us, and bring baby and nurse with you,—and Tom, whether he likes it or not. We can give him as much good shooting as will cure him of his laziness.'

'Yes, Mabel, indeed you must,' breaks in Lady Chetwoode's gentle voice. 'I want to see that dear child very badly, and how can I notice all her pretty ways unless she stays in the house with me?'

'Say yes, Mrs. Steyne,' entreats Taffy; 'I shall die of grief if you refuse.'

'Oh, that! Yes, Auntie, I shall come, thank you, if only to preserve Mr.—Taffy's life. But indeed, I shall be delighted to get back to the dear old home for awhile; it is so dull at Steynemore all by ourselves.'

'Thank you, darling,' says Tom meekly.

After dinner Mrs. Steyne, who has taken a fancy to Lilian, seats herself beside her in the drawing-room and chatters to her unceasingly

of all things known and unknown. Guy coming in later with the other men, sinks into a chair near Mabel, and with Miss Beauchamp's Fanchette upon his knee employs himself in stroking it and answering Mabel's numerous questions. He hardly looks at Lilian, and certainly never addresses her, in which he shows his wisdom.

'No, I can't bear the country,' Mrs. Steyne is saying. 'It depresses me.'

'In the spring surely it is preferable to town,' says Lilian.

'Is it? I suppose so, because I have so often heard it, but my taste is vitiated. I am not myself out of London. Of course Tom and I go somewhere every year, but it is to please fashion we go, not because we like it. You will say I exaggerate when I tell you that I find music in the very roll of the restless cabs.'

Lilian tells her that she will be badly off for music of that kind at Steynemore; but perhaps the birds will make up for the loss.'

'No, you will probably think me a poor creature when I confess to you I prefer Albani to the sweetest nightingale that ever trilled; that I simply detest the discordant noise made by the melancholy lamb; that I think the cuckoo tuneless and unmusical, and that I find no transcendent pleasure in the cooing of the fondest dove that ever mourned over its mate. These beauties of nature are thrown away upon me. Woodland groves and leafy dells are to me suggestive of suicide, and make me sigh for the "sweet shady side of Pall Mall." The country, in fact, is lonely, and my own society makes me shudder. I like noise and excitement, and the babel of tongues.'

'You forget the flowers,' says Lilian triumphantly.

'No, my dear; experience has taught me I

can purchase them cheaper and far finer than I can grow them for myself. I am a sceptic, I know,'—smiling. 'I will not try to convert you to my opinion.'

'Certainly I can see advantages to be gained from a town life,' says Lilian thoughtfully, leaning her elbow on a small table near her, and letting her chin sink into her little pink palm. 'One has a larger circle of acquaintances. Here everything is narrowed. One lives in the house with a certain number of persons and, whether one likes them or the reverse, one must put up with them. There is no escape. Yes' —with an audible and thoroughly meant sigh —'that is very sad.'

This little ungracious speech, though uttered in the most innocent tone, goes home (as is intended) to Guy's heart. He conceals, however, all chagrin, and pulls the ears of the sleepy snowball he is caressing with an air of the calmest unconcern.

'You mention a fact,' says Mrs. Steyne, the faintest inflection of surprise in her manner. 'But you, at least, can know nothing of such misery. Chetwoode is famous for its agreeable people, and you—you appear first favourite here. For the last hour I have been listening, and I have heard only "Lilian, look at this," or "Lilian, listen to that," or "Lilian child, what was it you told me yesterday?" You seem a great pet with everyone here.'

Lilian laughs.

'Not with everyone,' she says.

'No?'—raising her straight dark brows. 'Is there then an enemy in the camp? Not Cyril, surely?'

'Oh, no, not Cyril.'

Their voices involuntarily have sunk a little, and though anyone near can still hear distinctly, they have all the appearance of people carrying on a private conversation.

'Guy?'

Lilian is silent. Guy's face, as he still strokes the dog dreamily, has grown haughty in the extreme. He, like Mabel, awaits her answer.

'What?' says Mrs. Steyne in an amused tone, evidently treating the whole matter as a mere jest. 'So you are not a pet with Guy? How horrible! I cannot believe it. Surely Guy is not so ungallant as to have conceived a dislike for you? Guy, do you hear this awful charge she is bringing against you? Won't you refute it? Dear boy, how stern you look.'

'Do I? I was thinking of something disagreeable.'

'Of me?' puts in Lilian, *sotto voce*, with a faint laugh tinged with bitterness. 'Why should you think what I say so extraordinary? Did you ever know a guardian like his ward? or a ward like her guardian? I didn't,—es-

pecially the latter. They always find each other *such* a mistake!'

Sir Guy, raising his head, looks full at Lilian for a moment: his expression is almost impossible to translate; then getting up, he crosses the room deliberately and seats himself beside Florence, who welcomes him with one of her conventional smiles that now has something like warmth in it.

'I think you are a very cruel little girl,' says Mrs. Steyne gently, not looking at Lilian; and then turns the conversation into another channel.

'You will stay in the country until after Christmas?' says Lilian somewhat hastily.

'Yes; something has gone wrong with our steward's accounts, and Tom is dissatisfied with him. So he has been dismissed, and we shall stay on here until we please ourselves with another.'

'I am glad you live so near. Three miles is only a walk after all.'

'In cold weather a mere nothing, though for my own part I am not addicted to exercise of any sort; I believe, however, Steynemore's proximity to Chetwoode was one of my chief reasons for marrying Tom.'

'I am glad of any reason that made you do so. If you won't mind my saying it, I will tell you I like you very much,'—with a slight blush.

'I am very charmed to hear it,' says Mrs. Steyne heartily, whose liking for Lilian has grown steadily; 'I should be much disappointed if you didn't. I foresee we shall be great friends, and that you and Auntie will make me fall quite in love with Tom's native soil. But'—naïvely—'you must not be unkind to poor Guy!'

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CHAPTER XX.

Orl. 'Is't possible that on so little acquaintance
You should like her? that, but seeing,
You should love her?'—*As You Like It.*

FOUR weeks have flown by swiftly, with ungracious haste—as do all our happiest moments—leaving their marks behind them. In their train Taffy has passed away from Chetwcode, and all in the house have mourned his departure openly and sincerely. Miss Chesney for two whole days was inconsolable, and cried her pretty eyes very nearly out; after which she recovered, and allowed herself to find consolation in the thought that he has promised to return to them for a fortnight at Christmastide.

'Summer was dead and Autumn was expiring,
And infant Winter laughed upon the land
All cloudlessly and cold.'

The men spend half their days wondering if it will be a good hunting-season, the women are wrapt in delicious dreams of fur and velvet.

At the Cottage all the roses have fluttered into their graves, but in their place a sweeter flower has bloomed. Cecilia's eyes have grown brighter, gladder, her step firmer, her cheek richer in the tint that rivals the peach. In her calm home she has but one thought one hope, and that is Cyril. She has forbidden him to mention their engagement to Lady Chetwoode, so as yet the sweet secret is all their own.

Florence has gained a *bonâ fide* admirer; Mr. Boer—after much deliberation—having (for private reasons) decided in favour of Miss Beauchamp and her fifteen thousand pounds. But not for Mr. Boer, however well connected,

or however fondly cherished by a rich and aged uncle, can Miss Beauchamp bring herself to resign all hope of Guy and Chetwoode.

At Steynemore, Mabel and her baby are laughing the happy hours away; though to speak more accurately it is at Chetwoode most of them are spent. At least every second week they drive over there to find their rooms ready, and stay on well content to talk and crow at 'Auntie,' until the handsome head of that dearest of old ladies is fairly turned.

Lilian has of course gone over heart and mind to Miss Steyne, who rewards her affection by practising upon her the most ingenious tortures. With a craftiness terrible in one so young, she bides her opportunity and then pulls down all her friend's golden hair; at other times she makes frantic efforts at gouging out her eyes, tries to cut her eye-teeth upon

her slender fingers, and otherwise does all in her power to tear her limb from limb. She also appears to find infinite amusement in scrambling up and down Miss Chesney's unhappy knees, to the detriment of that dainty lady's very dainty gowns, and shows symptoms of fight when she refuses to consume all such uninviting remnants of cakes and bonbons as lie heavy on her hands.

Altogether Lilian has a lively time of it with Mabel's heiress, who, nevertheless, by right of her sweet witcheries and tender baby tricks has gained a fast hold upon her heart.

But if Baby knows a slave in Lilian, Lilian knows a slave in someone else. Up to this Archibald has found it impossible to tear himself away from her loved presence. Though ever since that fatal day at the Grange he has never dared speak openly to her of his attachment. Day by day his passion has

grown stronger, although with every wind her manner towards him seems to vary—now kind, to-morrow cold, anon so full of treacherous fancies, and disdainful glances as make him wonder whether in truth it is hatred and not love for her that fills his heart to overflowing. She is,

'One of those pretty, precious plagues, which haunt
A lover with caprices soft and dear,
That like to make a quarrel, when they can't
Find one, each day of the delightful year;
Bewitching, torturing, as they freeze or glow,
And—what is worst of all—won't let you go.'

Between her and Guy a silent truce has been signed. They now converse with apparent geniality; at times they appear, to outsiders, even to affect each other's society, but secretly they still regard one another with distrust, and to them alone is known the frailty of the coating that lies over their late hostility.

It is three o'clock, and the day for a

wonder is fine, all the past week having been sullen and full of a desire to rain. Now the clouds have disappeared, and the blue sky dotted with tiny flakes of foam-like vapour is overhead. The air is crispy, and, though cold, full of life and invigorating power.

'I shall go for a walk,' says Lilian, appearing suddenly in the billiard-room, looking like a little northern fairy so encased is she in velvet and dark fur. Upon her yellow hair is resting the most coquettish of fur caps, from beneath which her face smiles fairer and fresher for its rich surroundings. The two men she addresses look up, and let the honest admiration they feel for her betray itself in their eyes.

Outside the window, seated on the sill, which is some little distance from the ground, is Archibald smoking. Archibald, as a rule, is always smoking. Inside is Guy, also indulging in a cigar and disputing volubly about some

knotty point connected with guns or cartridges, or the proper size of shot to be used for particular birds, I cannot remember exactly what; I do remember, however, that the argument completely falls through when Lilian makes her appearance.

'Were there ever such lazy men?' says Miss Lilian scornfully. 'Did all the shooting with Tom Steyne last week do you up so completely? I warned you, if you will be pleased to recollect, that there wasn't much work in you. Well, I am going to the wood. Who will come with me?'

'I will,' say Guy and Archibald in a breath. And then ensues a pause.

'*Embarras de richesses*,' says Miss Chesney with a gay laugh and a slight elevation of her brows. 'You shouldn't all speak at once. Now, which shall I choose?' Then, impelled by the spirit of mischief that always possesses her when in her guardian's presence, she says,

'It would be a shame to take you out, Sir Guy, would it not? You seem so cosy here'—glancing at the fire—'while Archibald is evidently bent on exercise.'

'As you please, of course,' says Guy with well feigned indifference, too well feigned for Miss Chesney's liking; it angers her, and awakes within her a desire to show how little she heeds it. Her smile ripens and rests alone on Archibald; insensibly her manner towards her cousin takes a warmer tinge; going over to the window she lays her hand lightly on his shoulder and, leaning over, looks at the ground beneath.

'Could I get out there?' she asks a little fearfully, though in truth at another time she would regard with disdain the person who should tell her she could not jump so small a distance. 'It would be so much better than going all the way round.'

'Of course you can,' returns he, dropping instantly downwards, and then looking up at her, 'it is no height at all.'

'It looks high from here, does it not?'—still doubtful. 'I should, perhaps, break my neck if I tried to jump it. No,' regretfully, 'I must go round, unless, indeed,'—with another soft glance meant for Guy's discomfiture, and that, alas! does terrible damage to Archibald's heart —'you think you could take me down.'

'I know I could,' replies he eagerly.

'You are sure?'—hesitating—'I am very heavy, mind.'

Archibald laughs and holds out his arms, and in another moment has taken her, slender fairy that she is, and deposited her safely on the ground.

Sir Guy, who has been an unwilling though fascinated spectator of this scene, grows pale and turns abruptly aside as Archibald and

Lilian, laughing gaily, disappear into the shrubberies beyond.

But once out of sight of the billiard-room windows, Miss Chesney's gaiety cruelly deserts her. She is angry with Guy for reasons she would die rather than acknowledge even to herself, and she is indignant with Archibald for reasons she would be puzzled to explain at all, while hating herself for what she is pleased to term her frivolity, such as jumping out of windows as though she were still a child, instead of being a full-grown young woman! What must Gu—— what would anyone think of her?

'It was awfully good of you to choose me,' says Archibald after a few minutes, feeling foolishly elated at his success.

'For what?' coldly.

'For a walk.'

'Did I choose you?' asks Lilian in a tone

that should have warned so worldly-wise a young man as Chesney. He however fails to be warned and rushes wildly on his destruction.

'I thought so,' returns he growing perplexed; 'Chetwoode was quite as anxious to accompany you as I was, and you decided in my favour.'

'Simply because you were outside the window, and looked more like moving than he did.'

'He was considerably sold for all that,' says this foolish Archibald, with an idiotic laugh, that under the circumstances is madness. Miss Chesney freezes.

'Sold? how?' she asks with a suspicious thirst for knowledge. 'I don't understand.'

The continued iciness of her tone troubles Archibald.

'You seem determined not to understand,'

he says huffily. 'I only mean he would have given a good deal to go with you, until you showed him plainly you didn't want him.'

'I never meant to show him anything of the kind. You quite mistake.'

'Do I?'—with increasing wrath. 'Well, I think when a woman tells a fellow she thinks it would be a pity to disturb him, it comes to very much the same thing in the end. At all events Chetwoode took it in that light.'

'How silly you can be at times, Archibald,' says Lilian promptly; 'I really wish you would not take up such absurd notions. Sir Guy did *not* look at it in that light—he knows perfectly well I detest long walks, and that I seldom go for one, so he did not press the point. And in fact I think I shall change my mind now—walking is such a bore, is it not?'

'Are you not coming then?'—stopping

short, and growing black with rage; 'you don't seem to know your own mind for two minutes together, or else you are trying to provoke me! First you asked me to go to the wood with you, and now you say you will not go! what am I to think of it?'

'I wouldn't be rude if I were you,' says Miss Chesney calmly, 'and I wouldn't lose my temper. You make me absolutely uncomfortable when you let that wicked look grow upon your face. One would think you would like to murder me. Do try to be amiable! And as for trying to provoke you—I should not take the trouble! No, I shall not go with you now certainly, I shall go with Cyril,'—pointing to where Cyril is sauntering towards the entrance to the wood at some short distance from them.

Without waiting to address another word

to the discomfited Archibald, she runs to Cyril and slips her hand within his arm.

'Will you take me with you, wherever you are going?' she says, smiling confidently up into his face.

'What a foolish question; of course I am only too glad to get so dear a little companion,' replies he, smothering a sigh very successfully; though, to be honest, he is hardly enraptured at the thought of having Lilian's (or anyone's) society just now. Nevertheless he buries his chagrin, and is eminently agreeable to her as they stroll leisurely in the direction of the Cottage.

When they come up to it Lilian pauses.

'I wish this wonderful goddess would come out, I want to see her quite close,' she says, peeping through the hedge. 'At a distance she is beautiful; I am always wondering whether distance lends enchantment to the view?'

'No, it does not'—absently. He is looking over the hedge.

'You seem to know all about it'—archly—'shall I ask how? What lovely red berries!' suddenly attracted by some colouring a few yards away from her. 'Do you see? Wait until I get some.'

Springing on to a bank she draws down to her some bunches of mountain-ash berry, that glow like live coals in the fading greenery around them, and having detached her prize from the parent stem prepares to rejoin her companion who is somewhat distant.

'Why did you not ask me to get them for you?' he asks, rousing himself from his reverie; 'how precipitate you always are! Take care, child, that bank is steep.'

'But I am a sure-footed little deer,' says Miss Chesney, with a saucy shake of her pretty head, and as she speaks jumps boldly forward.

A moment later, as she touches the ground, she staggers, her right ankle refuses to support her, she utters a slight groan and sinks helplessly to the ground.

'You have hurt yourself,' exclaims Cyril, kneeling beside her. 'What is it, Lilian—is it your foot?'

'I think so,'—faintly—'it seems twisted. I don't know how it happened, but it pains me terribly. Just there all the agony seems to rest. Ah!' as another dart of anguish shoots through the injured ankle.

'My dear girl, what shall I do for you? why on earth did you not take my advice?' exclaims Cyril in a distracted tone. A woman's grief, a woman's tears, always unman him.

'Don't say you told me how it would be,' murmurs Lilian with a ghastly attempt at a smile that dies away in another moan. 'It

would be adding insult to injury. No, do not stir me—do not, I cannot bear it. Oh, Cyril, I think my ankle is broken.'

With this she grows a little paler, and draws her breath with a sharp sound, then whiter—whiter still, until at last her head sinks heavily upon Cyril's supporting arm, and he finds she has fallen into a deep swoon.

More frightened than he cares to allow, Cyril raises her in his arms and, without a moment's thought, conveys his slight burden straight to the Cottage.

Cecilia, who from an upper window has seen him coming with his strange encumbrance, runs down to meet him at the door, her face full of anxiety.

'What is it?' she asks breathlessly, bending over Lilian who is still fainting. 'Poor child! how white she is!'

'It is Lilian Chesney, she has sprained her

foot I think,' says Cyril, who is white too with concern; 'will you take her in while I go for a carriage?'

'Of course. Oh! make haste, her lips are quivering, I am sure she is suffering great agony. Bring her this way—or—no—shall I lay her on my bed?'

'The drawing-room sofa will do very well,' —going in and laying her gently on it; 'will you see to her? and give her some brandy and—and that.'

'Yes—yes. Now go quickly, and send a messenger for Doctor Bland, while you bring the carriage here. How pretty she is! what lovely hair! Poor little thing! Go, Cyril, and don't be long.'

When he has disappeared Mrs. Arlington summons Kate, and together they cut the boot off Lilian's injured foot, remove the dainty little silk stocking, and do for her all that can

be done until the doctor sees her. After which, with the help of eau de Cologne and some brandy, they succeed in bringing her to life once more.

'What has happened?' she asks languidly, raising her hand to her head.

'Are you better now?' Mrs. Arlington asks in return, stooping kindly over her.

'Yes, thank you, much better,'—gazing at her with some surprise; 'it was stupid of me to faint. But,'—still rather dazed—'where am I?'

'At the Cottage. Mr. Chetwoode brought you here.'

'And you are Mrs. Arlington?'—with a slight smile.

'Yes,'—smiling in return. 'Kate, put a little water into that brandy, and give it to Miss Chesney.'

'Please do not, Kate,' says Lilian in her

pretty friendly fashion; 'I hate brandy; if'—courteously—'I may have some sherry instead, I should like it.'

Having drunk the sherry, she sits up and looks quietly around her.

The room is a little gem in its own way, and suggestive of refinement of taste, and much delicacy in the art of colouring. Between the softly tinted pictures that hang upon the walls, rare bits of worcester and wedgewood fight for mastery. Pretty lounging-chairs covered with blue satin are dispersed here and there, while cosy couches peep out from every recess. *Bric-à-brac* of all kinds cover the small velvet tables, that are hung with priceless lace that only half conceals the spindle legs beneath. Exquisite little marble Loves and Venuses and Graces smile and pose upon graceful brackets; upon a distant table two charming Dresden baskets are to be seen

smothered in late flowers. All is bright, pretty, and artistic.

'What a charming room!' says Lilian with involuntary, and therefore flattering, admiration.

'You like it? I fear it must look insignificant to you after Chetwoode.'

'On the contrary, it is a relief. There, everything is heavy though handsome, as is the way in all old houses; here, everything is bright and gay. I like it so much, and you too if you will let me say so,' says Lilian holding out her hand, feeling already enslaved by the beauty of the tender, lovely face looking so kindly into hers. 'I have wanted to know you so long, but we knew,'—hesitating—'you wished to be quite quiet.'

'Yes, so I did when first I came here, but time and solitude have taught me many things. For instance'—colouring faintly—'I should be

very glad to know you; I feel sadly stupid now and then.'

'I am glad to hear you say so; I simply detest my own society,' says Miss Chesney with much vivacity, in spite of the foot. 'But'—with a rueful glance at the bandaged member—'I little thought I should make your acquaintance in this way. I have given you terrible trouble, have I not?'

'No, indeed, you must not say so. I believe'—laughing—'I have been only too glad, in spite of my former desire for privacy, to see some one from the outer world again. Your hair has come down. Shall I fasten it up again for you?' Hardly waiting an answer she takes Lilian's hair and binds, and twists it into its usual soft knot behind her head, admiring it as she does so. 'How soft it is, and how long, and such a delicious colour, like spun silk. I have always envied people with golden hair.

Ah, here is the carriage; I hope the drive home will not hurt you very much. She is ready now, Mr. Chetwoode, and I think she looks a little better.'

'I should be ungrateful otherwise,' says Lilian. 'Mrs. Arlington has been so kind to me, Cyril.'

'I am sure of that,' replies he, casting a curious glance at Cecilia that rather puzzles Lilian, until turning her eyes upon Cecilia, she sees what a pretty pink flush has stolen into her cheeks. Then the truth all at once flashes upon her, and renders her rather silent, while Cyril and Mrs. Arlington are making the carriage more comfortable for her.

'Come,' says Cyril, at length taking her in his arms. 'Don't be frightened, I will hurt you as little as I can help.' He lifts her tenderly, but the movement causes pain, and a touch of agony turns her face white again.

She is not a hero where suffering is concerned.

'Oh, Cyril, be careful,' says Mrs. Arlington fearfully, quite unconscious in her concern for Lilian's comfort that she has used the Christian name of her lover.

When Lilian is at length settled in the carriage, she raises herself to stoop out and take Cecilia's hand.

'Good-bye, and thank you again so much,' she says earnestly. 'And when I am well, may I come and see you?'

'You may indeed'—warmly. 'I shall be anxiously expecting you; I shall now'—with a gentle glance from the loving grey eyes—'have a double reason for wishing you soon well.'

Moved by a sudden impulse Lilian leans forward, and the two women as their lips meet seal a bond of friendship that lasts them all their lives.

For some time after they have left Cecilia's bower Lilian keeps silence, then all at once she says to Cyril in tones of the liveliest reproach,

'I wouldn't have believed it of you.'

'Would you not?' replies he, somewhat startled by this extraordinary address, being plunged in meditation of his own. 'You don't say so! But what is it then you can't believe?'

'I think'—with keen upbraiding—'you might have told *me*.'

'So I should, my dear, instantly, if I only knew what it was,'—growing more and more bewildered. 'If you don't want to bring on brain-fever, my good Lilian, you will explain what you mean.'

'You must have guessed what a treat a *real* love affair would be to me, who never knew a single instance of one,' says Lilian, 'and yet you meanly kept it from me.'

'Kept what?'—innocently, though he has the grace to colour hotly.

'Don't be deceitful, Cyril, whatever you are. I say it was downright unkind to leave me in ignorance of the fact that all this time there was a real, unmistakable, *bonâ fide* lover near me, close to me, at my *very elbow*, as one might say.'

'I know I am happy enough to be at your elbow just now,' says Cyril humbly, 'but to confess the truth I never yet dared to permit myself to look upon you openly with lover's eyes. I am still at a loss to know how you discovered the all-absorbing passion that I,—that *anyone* fortunate enough to know you,—must feel for you.'

'Don't be a goose,' says Miss Chesney with immeasurable scorn. 'Don't you think I have wit enough to see you are head over ears in love with that charming beautiful creature

down there in the Cottage? I don't wonder at that, I only wonder why you did not tell me of it when we were such good friends.'

'Are you quite sure I had anything to tell you?'

'Quite; I have eyes and I have ears. Did I not see how you looked at her, and how she blushed all up to the roots of her soft hair when you did so? and when you were placing me in the carriage she said "Oh, Cyril!" and what was the meaning of that, Master Chetwoode, eh? She is the prettiest woman I ever saw,' says Lilian, enthusiastically. 'To see her is indeed to love her. I hope *you* love her properly, with all your heart?'

'I do,' says Cyril, simply; 'I sometimes think, Lilian, it cannot be for one's happiness to love as I do.'

'Oh, this is delightful,' cries Lilian, clapping her hands; 'I am glad you are in earnest about

it; and I am glad you are both so good-looking. I don't think ugly people ought to fall in love, they quite destroy the romance of the whole thing.'

'Thanks awfully,' says Cyril. 'I shall begin to hold up my head now you have said a word in my favour. But,'—growing serious—'you really like her, Lilian? How can you be sure you do after so short an acquaintance?'

'I always like a person at once or not at all. I cannot explain why; it is a sort of instinct. Florence I detested at first sight, your Mrs. Arlington I love. What is her name?'

'Cecilia.'

'A pretty name, and suited to her; with her tender beautiful face she looks a saint. You are very fortunate, Cyril; something tells me you cannot fail to be happy, having gained the love of such a woman.'

'Dear little Sybil,' says Cyril, lifting one of her hands to his lips, 'I thank you for your prophecy. It does me good only to hear you say so.'

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CHAPTER XXI.

As on her couch of pain a child was lying.—*Song.*

EILIAN'S injury turns out to be not only a sprain, but a very bad one, and strict quiet and rest for the sufferer are enjoined by the fat little family doctor. So for several days she lies supine and obedient upon a sofa in Lady Chetwoode's boudoir, and makes no moan even when King Bore with all his horrible train comes swooping down upon her. He is in greatest force at such times as when all the others are downstairs dining, and she is (however regretfully) left to her own

devices. The servants passing to and fro with dishes sometimes leave the doors open, and then the sound of merry voices and laughter, that seems more frequent because she is at a distance and cannot guess the cause of their merriment, steals up to her, as she lies dolefully upon her pillows with her hands clasped behind her sunny head.

When four days of penance have so passed Lilian grows *triste*, then argumentative, then downright irritable, distracting Lady Chetwoode by asking her perpetually with tears in her eyes when she thinks she will be well. 'She is so tired of lying down. Her foot must be nearly well now. It does not hurt her nearly so much. She is sure, if she might only use it a little now and then, it would be well in half the time,' and so on.

At last, when a week has dragged itself to a close Lilian turns her cajoleries upon the doctor,

who is her sworn vassal, and coaxes and worries him into letting her go downstairs, if only to dine.

'Eh? So soon pining for freedom! Why, bless me, you have been only two or three days laid up.'

'Six long, *long* days, dear Doctor.'

'And now you would run the risk of undoing all my work. I cannot let you put your foot to the ground for a long time yet. Well'—softened by a beseeching glance—'if you must go down I suppose you must—but no walking mind! If I catch you walking I shall put you into irons and solitary confinement for a month. I daresay, Lady Chetwoode,'—smiling archly down upon Miss Chesney's slight figure—'there will be some young gentleman to be found in the house not only able but willing to carry to the dining-room so fair a burden!'

'We shall be able to manage that easily.

And it will be far pleasanter for her to be with us all in the evening. Guy, or her cousin Mr. Chesney, can carry her down.'

'I think, Auntie,'—speaking very slowly—'I should prefer Archibald.'

'Eh! Eh! you hear, madam, she prefers Archibald—happy Archibald!' cackles the little doctor merrily, being immensely tickled at his own joke.

'Archibald Chesney is her cousin,' replies Lady Chetwoode with a sigh, gazing rather wistfully at the girl's flushed, averted face.

So Lilian gains the day, and Sir Guy coming into his mother's boudoir half-an-hour later is told the glad news.

'Dr. Bland thinks her so much better,' Lady Chetwoode tells him. 'But she is not to let her foot touch the ground,—so you must be careful, darling,' to Lilian. 'Will you stay

with her a little while, Guy? I must go and write some letters.'

'I shan't be in the least lonely by myself, Auntie,' says Lilian smoothly, letting her fingers stray meaningly to the magazine beside her; yet in spite of this chilling remark Sir Guy lingers. He has taken up his station on the hearth-rug and is standing with his back to the fire, his arms crossed behind him, and instead of seeking to amuse his wounded ward, is apparently sunk in reverie. Suddenly, after a protracted silence on both sides, he raises his head, and regarding her earnestly says,

'May I take you down to dinner to-night, Lilian?'

'Thank you,'—formally—'it is very kind of you to offer, Sir Guy. But Archie was here a moment ago, and he has promised to take that trouble upon himself.' Then in a low but perfectly distinct tone, 'I can trust Archie!'

Although no more is said, Guy thoroughly understands her thoughts have travelled backwards to that one unlucky night when, through a kiss, he sinned past all chance of pardon. As his own mind follows hers, the dark colour mounts slowly to his very brow.

'Am I never to be forgiven for that one offence?' he asks, going up to her couch and looking gravely down upon her.

'I have forgiven, but unhappily I cannot forget,' returns she gently, without letting her eyes meet his. Then, with an air of deliberation, she raises her magazine, and he leaves the room.

So Sir Guy retires from the contest, and Archibald is elected to the coveted position of carrier to her capricious majesty, and this very night, to her great joy, brings her tenderly, carefully, to the dining-room, where a sofa has been prepared for her reception.

It so happens that three days later Archibald is summoned to London on business, and departs, leaving with Lilian his faithful promise to be back in time to perform his evening duty towards her.

But man's proposals, as we know, are not always carried out, and Chesney's falls lamentably short; as just at seven o'clock a telegram arriving for Lady Chetwoode tells her he has been unexpectedly detained in town by urgent matter, and cannot by any possibility get home till next day.

Cyril is dining with some bachelor friends near Truston; so Lady Chetwoode, who is always thoughtful, bethinks her there is no one to bring Lilian down to dinner except Guy. This certainly, for some inward reason, troubles her. She sighs a little as she remembers Lilian's marked preference for Chesney's assistance, then she turns to her maid—the telegram

has reached her as she is dressing for dinner—and says to her,

'A telegram from Mr. Chesney—he cannot be home to dinner. My hair will do very well, Hardy; go and tell Sir Guy he need not expect him.'

Hardy, going, meets Sir Guy in the hall below, and imparts her information.

Naturally enough he too thinks first of Lilian. Much as it displeases his pride he knows he must in common courtesy again offer her his rejected services. There is bitterness in the thought, and perhaps a little happiness also, as he draws his breath rather quickly, and angrily suppresses a half smile as it curls about his lips. To ask her again, to be again perhaps refused! He gazes irresolutely at the staircase, and then, with a secret protest against his own weakness, mounts it.

The second dinner-bell has already sounded

There is no time for further deliberation; going reluctantly upstairs, he seeks with slow and lingering footsteps his mother's boudoir.

The room is unlit save by the glorious fire, half wood, half coal, that crackles, and laughs, and leaps, in the joy of its own fast living. Upon a couch close to it, bathed in its warm flames, lies the little slender black-robed figure so inexpressibly dear to him. She is so motionless, that but for her wide eyes, gazing so earnestly into the fire, one might imagine her wrapt in slumber. Her left arm is thrown upwards so that her head rests upon it, the other hangs listlessly downwards almost touching the carpet beneath her.

She looks pale, but lovely. Her golden hair shines richly against the crimson satin of the cushion on which she leans. As Guy approaches her she never raises her eyes, although without doubt she sees him. Even

when he stands beside her and gazes down upon her, wrathful at her insolent disregard, she never pretends to be aware of his near presence.

'Dinner will be ready in three minutes,' he says, coldly; 'do you intend coming down to-night?'

'Certainly. I am waiting for my cousin,' she answers, with her eyes still fixed upon the fire.

'I am sorry to be the conveyer of news that must necessarily cause you disappointment. My mother has had a telegram from Chesney saying he cannot be home until to-morrow. Business detains him.'

'He promised me he would return in time for dinner,' she says, turning towards him at last, and speaking doubtfully.

'No doubt he is more upset than you can be at his unintended defection. But it is the

case for all that. He will not be home to-night.'

'Well, I suppose he could not help it.'

'I am positive he couldn't!'—coldly.

'You have great faith in him,'—with an unpleasant little smile; 'thank you, Sir Guy, it was very kind of you to bring me such disagreeable news.' As she ceases speaking she turns back again to the contemplation of the fire, as though desirous of giving him his *congé*.

'I can hardly say I came to inform you of your cousin's movements,' replies he haughtily; 'rather to ask you if you will accept my aid to get downstairs?'

'Yours!'

'Even mine?'

'No, thank you;'—with slow surprise, as though she yet doubts the fact of his having again dared to offer his services—'I would not trouble you for worlds!'

'The trouble is slight,' he answers, with an expressive glance at the fragile figure below him.

'But yet a trouble! Do not distress yourself, Sir Guy, Parkins will help me if you will be so kind as to desire him.'

'Your nurse'—hastily—'would be able, I daresay.'

'Oh, no. I can't bear trusting myself to women. I am an arrant coward. I always think they are going to trip, or let me drop, at every corner.'

'Then why refuse my aid?' he says, even at the price of his self-respect.

'No; I prefer Parkins!'

'Oh, if you prefer the assistance of a *footman*, there is nothing more to be said,' he exclaims angrily, going towards the door much offended, and with just a touch of disgust in his tone.

Now Miss Chesney does not prefer the assistance of a footman—in fact she would prefer solitude and a lonely dinner rather than trust herself to such an one; so she pockets her pride, and seeing Sir Guy almost outside the door, raises herself on her elbow and says pettishly, and with the most flagrant injustice,

'Of course I can stay here all by myself in the dark, if there is no one to take me down.'

'I wish I understood you,' says Guy irritably, coming back into the room. 'Do you mean you wish me to carry you down? I am quite willing to do so, though I wish with all my heart your cousin were here to take my place. It would evidently be much pleasanter for all parties. Nevertheless, if you deign to accept my aid,'—proudly—'I shall neither trip nor drop you, I promise.'

There is a superciliousness in his manner that vexes Lilian; but having an innate horror of

solitude, go down she will; so she says cuttingly,

'You are graciousness itself! you give me plainly to understand how irksome is this duty to you. I too wish Archie were here, for many reasons, but as it is ——' she pauses abruptly; and Guy, stooping, raises her quietly, tenderly, in his arms, and with the angry scowl upon his face and the hauteur still within his usually kind blue eyes begins his march downstairs.

It is rather a long march to commence, with a young woman however slender in one's arms. First comes the corridor which is of a goodly length, and after it the endless picture-gallery. Almost as they enter the latter, a little nail half hidden in the doorway catches in Lilian's gown, and dragging it roughly, somehow hurts her foot. The pain she suffers causes her to give way to a sharp cry, whereupon Guy stops short full of anxiety.

'You are in pain?' he says, gazing eagerly into the face so close to his own.

'My foot,' she answers, her eyes wet with tears; 'something dragged it—oh, how it hurts! And you promised me to be so careful, and now —— but I daresay you are *glad* I am punished,' she winds up vehemently, and then bursts out crying, partly through pain, partly through nervousness, and a good deal of self-torturing thought, long suppressed, and hides her face childishly against his sleeve because she has nowhere else to hide it. 'Lay me down,' she says, faintly.

There is a lounging-chair—close to the fire that always burns brightly in the long gallery; placing her in it, he stands a little aloof cursing his own ill-luck, and wondering what he has done to make her hate him so bitterly. Her tears madden him. Every fresh sob tears his heart. At last, unable to bear the mental

agony any longer, he kneels down beside her, and with an aspect of the deepest respect takes one of her hands in his.

'I am very unfortunate,' he says, humbly. 'Is it hurting you very much?'

'It is better now,' she whispers; but for all that she sobs on very successfully behind her handkerchief.

'You are not the only one in pain;'—speaking gently but earnestly—'every sob of yours causes me absolute torture.' This speech has no effect except to make her cry again harder than ever. It is so sweet to a woman to know a man is suffering tortures for her sake.

A little soft lock of her hair has shaken itself loose, and has wandered across her forehead. Almost unconsciously, but very lovingly, he moves it back into its proper place.

'What have I done, Lilian, that you should

so soon have learned to hate me ?' he whispers ; 'we used to be good friends.'

'So long ago '—in a stifled tone from behind the handkerchief—'that I have almost forgotten it.'

'Not so very long. A few weeks at the utmost,—before your cousin came.'

'Yes,'—with a sigh—'before your cousin came.'

'That is only idle recrimination. I know I once erred deeply, but surely I have repented, and,——Tell me why you hate me.'

'I cannot.'

'Why?'

'Because I don't know myself.'

'What! you confess you hate me without cause?'

'That is not it.'

'What then?'

'How can I tell you,' she says impatiently, 'when I know I don't hate you *at all*?'

'Lilian, is that true?'—taking away the handkerchief gently but forcibly that he may see her face, which after all is not nearly so tear-stained as it should be, considering all the heart-rending sobs to which he has been listening. 'Are you sure? am I not really distasteful to you? Perhaps even,—with an accession of hope, seeing she does not turn from him—'you like me a little, still?'

'When you are good,'—with an airy laugh and a slight pout—'I do a *little*. Yes'—seeing him glance longingly at her hand—'you may kiss it, and then we shall be friends again, for to-night at least. Now do take me down, Sir Guy; if we stay here much longer I shall be seeing bogies in all the corners. Already your ancestors seem to be frowning at me, and a more dark and bloodthirsty set of relatives I

never saw. I hope you won't turn out as bad to look at in your old age.'

'It all depends. When we are happy we are generally virtuous. Misery creates vice.'

'What a sententious speech!' He has taken up his fair burden again, and they are now (very slowly, I must say) descending the stairs. 'Now here comes a curve,' she says, with a return of all her old sauciness, 'please do not drop me.'

'I have half a mind to,'—laughing. 'Suppose, now, I let you fall cleverly over these banisters on to the stone flooring beneath, I should save myself from many a flout and many a scornful speech, and rid myself for ever of a troublesome little ward.'

Leaning her head rather backwards, she looks up into his face and smiles one of her sweetest, tenderest smiles.

'I am not afraid of you now, Guardy,' she

murmurs softly; whereat his foolish heart beats madly. The old friendly appellation, coming so unexpectedly from her, touches him deeply; it is with difficulty he keeps himself from straining her to his heart and pressing his lips upon the beautiful childish mouth upheld to him. He has had his lesson, however, and refrains.

He is still regarding her with unmistakable admiration, when Miss Beauchamp's voice from the landing above startles them both, and makes them feel, though why they scarcely know, partners in guilt.

There is a metallic ring in it that strikes upon the ear, and suggests all sorts of ladylike disgust and condemnation.

'I am sure, Guy, if Lilian's foot be as bad as she says it is, she would feel more comfortable lying on a sofa. Are you going to pose there all the evening for the benefit of the

servants? I think it is hardly good taste of you to keep her in your arms upon the public staircase, whatever you may do in private.'

The last words are uttered in a rather lowered tone, but are still distinctly audible. Lilian blushes a slow and painful red, and Sir Guy, giving way to a naughty word that is also distinctly audible, carries her down instantly to the dining-room.

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CHAPTER XXII.

For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

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This thought is as a death.—SHAKESPEARE.

THE next day is dark and lowering, to Lilian's great joy, who, now she is prevented by lameness from going for one of her loved rambles, finds infinite satisfaction in the thought that even were she quite well it would be impossible for her to stir out of doors. According to her mode of arguing this is one day not lost.

About two o'clock Archibald returns, in time for luncheon, and to resume his care of

Lilian, who gives him a gentle scolding for his desertion of her in her need. He is full of information about town, and their mutual friends there, and imparts it freely.

'Everything is as melancholy up there as it can be,' he says, 'and very few men to be seen; the clubs are deserted; all shooting or hunting, no doubt. The rain was falling in torrents all the day.'

'Poor Archie, you have been having a bad time of it, I fear.'

'In spite of the weather and her ruddy locks Lady Belle Damascene has secured the prize of the season, out of season. She is engaged to Lord Wyntermere; it is not yet publicly announced, but I called to see her mother for five minutes, and so great was her exultation she could not refrain from whispering the delightful intelligence into my ear. Lady Belle is staying with his people now in Sussex.'

'Certainly, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." She is painfully ugly,' says Miss Beauchamp. 'Such feet, such hands and such a shocking complexion!'

'She is very kind-hearted and amiable,' says Cyril.

'That is what is always said of a plain woman,' retorts Florence; 'when you hear a girl is amiable, always conclude she is hideous. When one's trumpeter is in despair he says that.'

'I am sure Lord Wyntermere must be a young man of sound good sense,' says Lilian, who never agrees with Florence. 'If she has a kind heart he will never be disappointed in her. And after all there is no such great advantage to be derived from beauty. When people are married for four or five years, I daresay they quite forget whether the partner

of their joys and sorrows was originally lovely or the reverse; custom deadens perception.'

'It is better to be good than beautiful,' says Lady Chetwoode, who abhors ugly women; 'you know what Carew says:—

> But a smooth and steadfast mind,
> Gentle thoughts, and calm desires,
> Hearts with equal love combined,
> Kindle never-dying fires:
> Where these are not, I despise
> Lovely cheeks or lips or eyes.'

'Well done, Madré,' says Cyril. 'You are coming out. I had no idea you were so gifted. Your delivery is perfect.'

'And what are you all talking about?' continues Lady Chetwoode; 'I think Belle Damascene very sweet to look at. In spite of her red hair, and a good many freckles, and—and—a rather short nose, her expression is very lovable; when she smiles I always feel inclined

to kiss her. She is like her mother, who is one of the best women I know.'

'If you encourage my mother she will end by telling you Lady Belle is a beauty and a reigning toast,' says Guy, *sotto voce*.

Lady Chetwoode laughs, and Lilian says,

'What is everyone wearing now, Archie?'

'There is nobody to wear anything. For the rest, they had all on some soft, shiny, stuff like the dress you wore the night before last.'

'What an accurate memory you have,' says Florence, letting her eyes rest on Guy's for a moment, though addressing Chesney.

'Satin,' translates Lilian, unmoved. 'And their bonnets?'

'Oh, yes! they all wore bonnets or hats, I don't know which,'—vaguely.

'Naturally; mantillas are not yet in vogue. You are better than "Le Follet," Archie; your

answers are so satisfactory. Did you meet anyone we know?'

'Hardly anyone. By the by,'—turning curiously to Sir Guy—'was Trant here to-day?'

'No,'—surprised—'why do you ask?'

'Because I met him at Truston this morning. He got out of the train by which I went on—it seems he has been staying with the Bulstrodes—and I fancied he was coming on here, but had not time to question him, as I barely caught the train; another minute's delay and I should have been late.'

Archibald rambles on about his near escape of being late for the train, while his last words sink deep into the minds of Guy and Cyril. The former grows singularly silent; a depressed expression gains upon his face. Cyril on the contrary becomes feverishly gay, and with his

mad observations, makes merry Lilian at least laugh heartily.

But when luncheon is over and they all disperse, a gloom falls upon him; his features contract; doubt and a terrible suspicion, augmented by slanderous tales that for ever seem to be poured into his ears, make havoc of the naturally kindly expression that characterises his face, and with a stifled sigh he turns and walks towards the billiard-room.

Guy follows him. As Cyril enters the door-way, he enters too, and closing the door softly, lays his hand upon his shoulder.

'You heard, Cyril?' he says, with exceeding gentleness.

'Heard what?'—turning somewhat savagely upon him.

'My dear fellow,'—affectionate entreaty in his tone—'do not be offended with me. Will you not listen, Cyril? It is very painful to me

to speak, but how can I see my brother so—so shamefully taken in, without uttering a word of warning.'

'If you were less tragic and a little more explicit it might help matters,' replies Cyril with a sneer and a short unpleasant laugh. 'Do speak plainly.'

'I will then,'—desperately—'since you desire it. There is more between Trant and Mrs. Arlington than we know of. I do not speak without knowledge. From several different sources I have heard the same story—of his infatuation for some woman, and of his having taken a house for her in some remote spot. No names were mentioned, mind! but from what I have unwillingly listened to, it is impossible not to connect these evil whispers that are afloat with him and her. Why does he come so often to the neighbourhood and yet never dare to present himself at Chetwoode?'

'And you believe Trant capable of so far abusing the rights of friendship as to ask you —*you*—to supply the house in the remote spot?'

'Unfortunately, I must.'

'You are speaking of your friend,'—with a bitter sneer—'and you can coldly accuse him of committing so blackguardly an action?'

'If all I have heard be true (and I have no reason to doubt it) he is no longer any friend of mine;' says Guy, haughtily. 'I shall settle with *him* later on when I have clearer evidence; in the meantime it almost drives me mad to think he should have dared to bring down here, so close to my mother, his——'

'What?' cries Cyril, fiercely, thrusting his brother from him with passionate violence. 'What is it you would say? Take care, Guy; take care, you have gone too far already. From

whom, pray, have you learned your infamous story?'

'I beg your pardon,' Guy says, gently, extreme regret visible in his countenance. 'I should not have spoken so, under the circumstances. It was not from one alone, but from several, I heard what I now tell you. Though I must again remind you that no names were mentioned; still I could not help drawing my own conclusions.'

'They lied!' returns Cyril, passionately, losing his head; 'you may tell them so from me. And you,'—half choking—'you lie too when you repeat such vile slanders.'

'It is useless to argue with you,' Guy says, coldly, the blood mounting hotly to his forehead at Cyril's insulting words; while his expression grows stern and impenetrable; 'I waste time. Yet this last word I will say: Go down to the Cottage—now—this moment—and

convince yourself of the truth of what I have said.'

He turns angrily away; while Cyril, half mad with indignation and unacknowledged fear, follows this final piece of advice, and almost unconsciously leaving the house, takes the wonted direction, and hardly draws breath until the trim hedges and pretty rustic gates of the Cottage are in view.

The day is showery, threatening since dawn, and now the rain is falling thickly, though he heeds it not at all.

As with laggard steps, he draws still nearer the abode of her he loves yet does not wholly trust, the sound of voices smites upon his ear. He is standing upon the very spot—somewhat elevated—that overlooks the arbour where so long ago Miss Beauchamp stood and learned his acquaintance with Mrs. Arlington. Here how he too stays his steps, and

gazes spell-bound upon what he sees before him.

In the arbour, with his back turned to Cyril, is a man, tall, elderly, with an iron-grey moustache. Though not strictly handsome, he has a fine and very military bearing, and a figure quite unmistakable to one who knows him; with a sickly chill at his heart, Cyril acknowledges him to be Colonel Trant.

Cecilia is beside him. She is weeping bitterly, but quietly, and with one hand conceals her face with her handkerchief. The other is fast imprisoned in both of Trant's.

A film settles upon Cyril's eyes, a dull faintness overpowers him, involuntarily he places one hand upon the trunk of a near elm to steady himself; yet through the semi-darkness, the strange, unreal feeling that possesses him, the voices still reach him cruelly distinct.

'Do not grieve so terribly, it breaks my heart to see you, darling, *darling*,' says Trant, in a low, impassioned tone; and raising the hand he holds, presses his lips to it tenderly. The slender white fingers tremble perceptibly under the caress, and then Cecilia says in a voice hardly audible through her tears,

'I am so unhappy, it is all my fault; knowing you loved me, I should have told you before of——'

But her voice breaks the spell; Cyril, as it meets his ears, rouses himself with a start. Not once again does he even glance in her direction, but with a muttered curse at his own folly turns and goes swiftly homewards.

A very frenzy of despair and disappointment rages within him: To have so loved—to be so foully betrayed! Her tears, her sorrow (connected no doubt with some early passages between her and Trant), because of

their very poignancy, only render him the more furious.

On reaching Chetwoode he shuts himself into his own room, and feigning an excuse, keeps himself apart from the rest of the household all the remainder of the evening and the night. 'Knowing you loved me'—the words ring in his ears. Ay, she knew it—who should know it better?—but had carefully kept back all mention of the fact when pressed by him, Cyril, upon the subject. All the world knew what he, poor fool, had been the last to discover. And what was it her tender conscience was accusing her of not having told Trant before?—of her flirtation, as no doubt she mildly termed all the tender looks, and speeches, and clinging kisses, and loving protestations so freely bestowed upon Cyril—of her flirtation, no doubt.

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The next morning, after a sleepless night, he starts for London, and there spends three reckless miserable days that leave him wan and aged through reason of the conflict he is waging with himself. After which a mad desire to see again the cause of all his misery, to openly accuse her of her treachery, to declare to her all the irreparable mischief she has done, the utter ruin she has made of his life, seizes hold upon him, and leaving the great city, and reaching Truston, he goes straight from the station to the cottage once so dear.

In her garden Cecilia is standing all alone. The wind is sighing plaintively through the trees that arch above her head, the thousand dying leaves are fluttering to her feet. There is a sense of decay and melancholy in all around, that harmonizes exquisitely with the dejection of her whole manner. Her attitude is sad and drooping, her air depressed; there

are tears, and an anxious expectant look in her grey eyes.

'Pining for her lover no doubt,' says Cyril between his teeth (in which supposition he is right); and then he opens the gate, and goes quickly up to her.

As she hears the well-known click of the latch she turns, and seeing him, lets fall unheeded to the ground the basket she is holding, and runs to him with eyes alight, and soft cheeks tinged with a lovely generous pink, and holds out her hands to him with a little low glad cry.

'At last, truant!' she exclaims joyfully; 'after three whole long, long days; and what has kept you from me? Why Cyril, Cyril!'—recoiling, while a dull ashen shade replaces the gay tinting of her cheeks—'what has happened? How oddly you look! You, you are in trouble?'

'I am,'—in a changed harsh tone she scarcely realizes to be his, moving back with a gesture of contempt from the extended hands that would so gladly have clasped his. 'In so far you speak the truth; I have discovered all. One lover, it appears, was not sufficient for you, you should dupe another for your amusement. It is an old story, but none the less bitter. No, it is useless your speaking'—staying her with a passionate movement—'I tell you I know *all*.'

'All what?' she asks. She has not removed from his her lustrous eyes, though her lips have turned very white.

'Your perfidy.'

'Cyril, explain yourself,' she says in a low agonized tone, her pallor changing to a deep crimson. And to Cyril hateful certainty appears if possible more certain, by reason of this luckless blush.

'Ay, you may well change countenance,' he says, with suppressed fury in which keen agony is blended; 'have you yet the grace to blush? As to explanation, I scarcely think you can require it; yet as you demand it you shall have it. For weeks I have been hearing of you tales, in which your name and Trant's were always mingled; but I disregarded them, I madly shut my ears and was deaf to them; I would not believe, until it was too late, until I saw, and learned beyond dispute the folly of my faith. I was here last Friday evening!'

'Yes?'—calmly, though in her soft eyes a deep well of bitterness has sprung.

'Well, you were there, in that arbour'—pointing to it—'where *we*'—with a scornful laugh—'so often sat; but then you had a more congenial companion. Trant was with you. He held your hand, he caressed it; he called you his "darling," and you allowed it, though

indeed why should you not? doubtless it is a customary word from him to you! And then you wept as though your heart, your *heart*'—contemptuously—'would break; were you confessing to him your coquetry with me? and perhaps obtaining an easy forgiveness?'

'No, I was not'—quietly, though there is immeasurable scorn in her tone.

'No?'—slightingly. 'For what, then, were you crying?'

'Sir,'—with a first outward sign of indignation—'I refuse to tell you. By what right do you now ask the question? yesterday, nay, an hour since, I should have felt myself bound to answer any inquiry of yours, but not now. The tie between us, a frail one as it seems to me, is broken; our engagement is at an end; I shall not answer you!'

'Because you dare not,' retorts he fiercely, stung by her manner.

'I think you dare too much when you venture so to address me,'—in a low clear tone. 'And yet as it is in all human probability the last time we shall ever meet, and as I would have you remember all your life long the gross injustice you have done me, I shall satisfy your curiosity. But recollect, sir, these are indeed the final words that shall pass between us.

'A year ago Colonel Trant so far greatly honoured me as to ask me to marry him; for many reasons I then refused. Twice since I came to Chetwoode he has been to see me: once to bring me law papers of some importance, and last Friday to again ask me to be his wife. Again I refused. I wept then, because, unworthy as I am, I knew I was giving pain to the truest, and as I now know,' —with a faint trembling in her voice quickly subdued—'the *only* friend I have! When declining his proposal, I gave him my reason

for doing so! I told him I loved another! That other was you!'

Casting this terrible revenge in his teeth, she turns, and walking majestically into the house, closes the door with significant haste behind her.

This is the one solitary instance of inhospitality shown by Cecilia in all her life. Never until now was she known to shut her door in the face of trouble. And surely Cyril's trouble at this moment is sore and needy!

To disbelieve Cecilia when face to face with her is impossible. Her eyes are truth itself. Her whole manner, so replete with dignity and offended pride, declares her innocent. Cyril stands just where she has left him, in stunned silence, for at least a quarter of an hour; repeating to himself miserably all that she has said, and reminding himself with cold-blooded cruelty of all he has said to her.

At the end of this awful fifteen minutes, he bethinks himself his hair must now, if ever, be turned grey; and then a happier and more resolute thought striking him, he takes his courage in his two hands, and walking boldly up to the hall door, knocks and demands admittance with really admirable composure. Abominable composure! thinks Cecilia, who in spite of her stern determination never to know him again, has been watching him covertly from behind a handkerchief and a bedroom curtain all this time, and is now stationed at the top of the staircase, with dim eyes, but very acute ears.

'Yes,' Kate tells him, 'her mistress is at home;' and forthwith shows him into the bijou drawing-room. After which she departs to tell her mistress of his arrival.

Three minutes, that to Cyril's excited fancy

lengthen themselves into twenty, pass away slowly, and then Kate returns.

'Her mistress's compliments, and she has a terrible headache, and will Mr. Chetwoode be so kind as to excuse her.'

Mr. Chetwoode on this occasion is not kind. 'He is sorry,' he stammers, 'but if Mrs. Arlington could let him see her for five minutes, he would not detain her longer. He has something of the utmost importance to say to her.'

His manner is so earnest, so pleading, that Kate, who scents at least a death in the air, retires full of compassion for the 'pore gentleman.' And then another three minutes, that now to the agitated listener appear like forty, drag themselves into the past.

Suspense is growing intolerable, when a well-known step in the hall outside makes his heart beat almost to suffocation. The door is opened slowly, and Mrs. Arlington comes in.

'You have something to say to me?' she asks, curtly, unkindly, standing just inside the door, and betraying an evident determination not to sit down for any consideration upon earth. Her manner is uncompromising and forbidding, but her eyes are very red. There is rich consolation in this discovery.

'I have,' replies Cyril, openly confused now it has come to the point.

'Say it then. I am here to listen to you. My servant tells me it is something of the deepest importance.'

'So it is. In all the world there is nothing so important to me. Cecilia,'—coming a little nearer to her—'it is that I want your forgiveness; I ask your pardon very humbly, and I throw myself upon your mercy. You must forgive me!'

'Forgiveness seems easy to you, who cannot feel,' replies she, haughtily, turning as though

to leave the room; but Cyril intercepts her, and places his back against the door.

'I cannot let you go until you are friends with me again,' he says, in deep agitation.

'Friends!'

'Think what I have gone through. *You* have only suffered for a few minutes, *I* have suffered for three long days. Think of it. My heart was breaking all the time. I went to London hoping to escape thought, and never shall I forget what I endured in that detestable city. Like a man in a dream I lived, scarcely seeing, or if seeing, only trying to elude those I knew. At times——'

'You went to London?'

'Yes, that is how I have been absent for three days; I have hardly slept or eaten since last I saw you.'

Here Cecilia is distinctly conscious of a feeling of satisfaction: next to a man's dying

for you, the sweetest thing is to hear of a man's starving for you!

'Sometimes,' goes on Cyril, piling up the agony higher and higher, and speaking in his gloomiest tones, 'I thought it would be better if I put an end to it once for all, by blowing out my brains.'

'How dare you speak to me like this?' Cecilia says, in a trembling voice; 'it is horrible. You would commit suicide? Am I not unhappy enough that you must seek to make me more so? Why should you blow your brains out?'—with a shudder.

'Because I could not live without you. Even now,'—reproachfully—'when I see you looking so coldly upon me, I almost wish I had put myself out of the way for good.'

'Cyril, I forbid you to talk like this.'

'Why? I don't suppose you care whether I am dead or alive.' This artful

speech, uttered in a heart-broken tone, does immense execution.

'If you were dead,' begins she forlornly, and then stops short, because her voice fails her, and two large tears steal silently down her cheeks.

'Would you care?' asks Cyril, going up to her and placing one arm gently round her; being unrepulsed, he gradually strengthens this arm with the other. 'Would you?'

'I hardly know.'

'Darling, don't be cruel. I was wrong, terribly, unpardonably wrong, ever to doubt your sweet truth; but when one has stories perpetually dinned into one's ears, one naturally grows jealous of one's shadow, when one loves as I do.'

'And, pray, who told you all these stories?'

'Never mind.'

'But I do mind,'—with an angry sob.

'What! you are to hear lies of me, and to believe them! and I am not even to know who told you them! I do mind, and I insist on knowing.'

'Surely it cannot signify now, when I tell you I don't believe them.'

'It does signify, and I should be told. But indeed I need not ask,'—with exceeding bitterness—'I know. It was your brother, Sir Guy. He has always (why, I know not) been a cruel enemy of mine.'

'He only repeated what he heard. He is not to be blamed.'

'It *was* he then?'—quickly. 'But "blamed"?—of course not, no one is in the wrong I suppose but poor me! I think, sir,'—tremulously—'it would be better you should go home, and forget you ever knew anyone so culpable as I am. I should be afraid to marry into a

family that could so misjudge me as yours does. Go, and learn to forget me.'

'I can go, of course, if you desire it,'—laying hold of his hat; 'that is a simple matter, but I cannot promise to forget. To some people it may be easy, to me impossible.'

'Nothing is impossible. The going is the first step. Oblivion,'—with a sigh—'will quickly follow.'

'I do not think so. But since you wish my absence——' He moves towards the door with lowered head and dejected manner.

'I did not say I wished it'—in faltering tones; 'I only requested you to leave me for your own sake, and because I would not make your people unhappy. Though'—piteously—'it should break my heart, I would still bid you go.'

'Would it break your heart?'—flinging his hat into a corner; (for my own part, I don't

believe he ever meant going;) coming up to her, he folds her in his arms. 'Forgive me, I entreat you,' he says, 'for what I shall never forgive myself.'

The humbleness of this appeal touches Cecilia's tender heart. She makes no effort to escape from his encircling arms; she even returns one out of his many caresses.

'To think you could behave so badly to me!' she whispers reproachfully.

'I am a brute! I know it.'

'Oh, no! indeed you are not,' says Mrs. Arlington. 'Well, yes,'—drawing a long breath,—'I forgive you; but *promise*, promise you will never distrust me again.'

Of course he gives the required promise, and peace is once more restored.

'I shall not be content with an engagement any longer,' Cyril says presently. 'I consider it eminently unsatisfactory. Why not marry

me at once? I have nine hundred a year, and a scrap of an estate a few miles from this—by the bye, you have never yet been to see your property—and if you are not afraid to venture, I think we might be very happy, even on that small sum.'

'I am not afraid of anything with you,' she says in her calm, tender fashion; 'and money has nothing to do with it. If,' with a troubled sigh, 'I ever marry you, I shall not come to you empty-handed.'

'"If, dost thou answer me with ifs?"' quotes he gaily. 'I tell you, sweet, there is no such word in my dictionary. I shall only wait a favourable opportunity to ask my mother's consent to our marriage.'

'And if she refuses it?'

'Why then I shall marry you without hers, or yours, or the consent of any one in the world.'

'You jest,' she says, tears gathering in her large appealing eyes. 'I would not have you make your mother miserable.'

'Above all things do not let me see tears in your eyes again,' he says quickly. 'I forbid it. For one thing it makes me wretched, and'—softly—'it makes me feel sure *you* are wretched, which is far worse. Cecilia, if you don't instantly dry those tears I shall be under the painful necessity of kissing them away. I tell you I shall get my mother's consent very readily. When she sees you, she will be only too proud to welcome such a daughter.'

Soon after this they part, more in love with each other than ever.

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END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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